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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Bengaluru Metro may raise fares again

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Bengaluru Metro is likely to increase passenger fares by Rs 1 to Rs 5 from 9 February, despite continuing public backlash over last year's steep hike of up to 71 percent.

Officials said the annual fare revision recommended by the Fare Fixation Committee (FFC) last year is binding on the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL). The committee had mandated that the automatic annual fare fixation formula be implemented until a new FFC is constituted. At present, Bengaluru Metro is the costliest metro system in the country. *—Agencies*

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Turkey plane lands in Kolkata after fire in engine

KOLKATA, 4 FEB

A Turkish Airlines Airbus A330-300 made an emergency landing at Kolkata's NSCBI Airport after the pilot reported a fire in the right engine, the Civil Aviation Ministry said. Flight THY 727, flying from Kathmandu to Istanbul with 236 passengers and 11 crew, declared a PAN PAN distress signal at 1.38 pm due to the engine malfunction and requested diversion. The fire was brought under control mid-flight by 1.51pm, and the aircraft landed safely shortly after 2.30pm. No injuries were reported. Officials highlighted that modern wide-body jets are designed to fly, climb, and land safely with one engine and have built-in fire suppression systems. *—PTI*

One terrorist killed in fresh encounter in Kishtwar

JAMMU, 4 FEB

A suspected Pakistani terrorist was killed Wednesday evening in Kishtwar district, Jammu and Kashmir,, marking the fifth encounter in the Chatroo belt in 18 days. Security forces are hunting militants linked to the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) outfit. The Army's White Knight Corps reported that troops from Counter-Insurgency Force Delta, J&K Police, and CRPF re-established contact with the terrorists in Dichhar around 5.45pm, neutralising one suspect. The operation began during searches in snowy Sanjinala-Dichhar. Previous encounters since 18 January left one paratrooper dead and seven soldiers injured. The operation is on-going. *—PTI*

Rahul calls Bittu 'traitor', draws BJP's wrath

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi kicked up a firestorm on Wednesday when he called Union minister Ravneet Singh Bittu a "traitor", prompting the BJP to accuse him of insulting the entire Sikh community and demand that Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla takes action against him. Several top BJP leaders came out to attack Gandhi, accusing him of having an "anti-Sikh mentality", even as some Sikh MPs stood out in support of him. BJP leaders from Delhi also staged a protest outside Congress's Akbar road office and raised slogans against Gandhi. The faceoff happened outside Parliament's Makar Dwar. *—PTI*

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BJP's Khemchand Singh sworn in as Manipur CM

Prez rule removed after a year; state gets Kuki, Naga DyCMs

IMPHAL, 4 FEB

BJP MLA Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Wednesday took oath as the 13th Chief Minister of Manipur, hours after President's Rule was revoked in the violence-hit State.

The significant event marked the restoration of a popular government nearly a year after the resignation of N Biren Singh.

The 62-year-old leader was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at Lok Bhavan in Imphal. BJP MLA Nemcha Kipgen, from the Kuki community, and Naga People's Front legislator L Dikho were sworn in as Deputy CMs, while Govindas Konthoujam of the BJP and K Loken Singh of the NPP took oath as ministers. Kipgen took the oath virtually from Manipur Bhavan in New Delhi.

BJP legislator Yumnam Khemchand Singh signs during his swearing-in as new Manipur Chief Minister, in Imphal, Manipur, Wednesday *—PTI*

President's Rule, imposed on 13 February, 2025, was revoked earlier in the day through a proclamation issued by President Droupadi Murmu under Article 356, with effect from 4 February, 2026. The Assembly had been under suspended animation following months of ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities.

The unrest began on 3 May, 2023, after a tribal solidarity march opposing the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. At least 260 people were killed and thousands displaced.

Addressing reporters, Khemchand Singh said Manipur, home to 36 communities, had been sustained through inclusiveness. Dikho said inclusivity would guide the new government, adding "Why not?" when asked about action against armed groups threatening Kuki legislators.

An NDA delegation had earlier staked a claim to form the government. BJP spokesperson Laimayum Bashanta Sharma said the new dispensation would pave the way for peace and development. During President's Rule, gunfiring incidents declined, with security forces arresting over 1,000 militants and recovering more than 3,000 arms. *—PTI*

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'WHY ONLY WB NOT ASSAM'

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee argues against the SIR in Supreme Court on Wednesday *—PTI*

Bengal bulldozed by EC: Didi takes SIR battle to SC

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

- Banerjee urged the apex court to "save democracy" and intervene to ensure a fair revision process, claiming that the exercise had led to large-scale deletion of genuine voters.

Mamata Banerjee became the first serving chief minister to argue in the Supreme Court on Wednesday as she sought an intervention in the SIR (Special Intensive Revision) of electoral rolls, alleging that West Bengal was being "targeted" and its people were being "bulldozed".

The court took note of Banerjee's petition and said genuine persons must remain on electoral rolls.

Banerjee urged the apex court to "save democracy" and intervene to ensure a fair revision process, claiming that the exercise had led to large-scale deletion of genuine voters, including people who were "alive but declared dead" by the poll panel. She alleged that nearly 58 lakh names had been deleted from electoral rolls without providing affected citizens an effective opportunity to appeal.

The chief minister, represented by senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Shyam Divan, sought and received permission from a bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant to supplement her lawyers' submissions. The bench also comprised Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi.

Banerjee told the court that despite writing six letters to the Election Commission, she had received no response. "Their SIR process is only for deletion, not for inclusion," she said, alleging discrimination against West Bengal. Questioning why similar standards were not applied in Assam

She highlighted hardships faced by citizens during the revision exercise and welcomed the court's earlier direction allowing Aadhaar as a valid document. However, she alleged that the Election Commission was not implementing the order and continued to demand additional documents. "In other states, documents like domicile certificates and family register cards are accepted. Why is only Bengal being targeted?" Banerjee asked. *—PTI*

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EAM, Rubio discuss rare minerals, nuke deals

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 4 FEB

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Tuesday during his three-day visit to the United States, days after India and the US finalised a long-pending trade deal reducing US tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent.

The "wide-ranging" discussions covered trade, energy, nuclear cooperation, defence, technology, and critical minerals, alongside regional and global issues, Jaishankar said. The talks came ahead of the inaugural critical minerals ministerial scheduled for Wednesday.

The leaders hailed the trade agreement between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Jaishankar is in US for the inaugural Critical Minerals Ministerial meeting hosted by the US.

The summit gains significance as US is creating a critical minerals trading bloc with allies to counter China's dominance in the sector.

At the summit, Vice President JD Vance said, "We will establish reference prices for critical minerals at each stage of production. And for members of the preferential zone, these reference prices will operate as a floor, maintained through adjustable tariffs to uphold pricing integrity."

Meanwhile, China, which holds a vice-like grip over the critical minerals, called for "jointly" keeping the supply chains stable and secure ahead of Trump's key meeting in Washington to discuss steps to bypass Beijing's chokehold over the rare earths.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio during a meeting, in US *—PTI*

INDIA TO NO LONGER BUY RUSSIAN OIL: WH

The White House has hailed a new trade agreement with India, saying the country has committed to "no longer" purchasing Russian oil, with Modi also agreeing on investments of USD 500 billion in American sectors. —PTI

>>>More on Pages 3 & 6

India free to buy oil from anyone: Russia

MOSCOW, 4 FEB

India is free to buy oil from any country, and there is nothing new about its decision to diversify its crude suppliers, the Kremlin said on Wednesday.

"We, along with all other international energy experts, are well aware that Russia is not the only supplier of oil and petroleum products to India. India has always purchased these products from other countries. Therefore, we see nothing new here," Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said while responding to a question.

He was asked about US President Donald Trump's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had agreed to stop buying Russian oil and switch to purchasing crude from the United States and, potentially, from Venezuela.

A day earlier, Peskov said that Russia has not received any statements from India regarding the cessation of Russian oil purchases. *—PTI*

LS adjourned again as standoff continues over Rahul's remark

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Lok Sabha proceedings on Wednesday were repeatedly disrupted leading to multiple adjournments even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's response to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address loomed.

The House was adjourned soon after resuming at 5 pm, amid indications that Modi might speak. Earlier, Congress and other opposition members staged protests, raising slogans, displaying banners and placards, and occupying the Well and aisles.

Tensions escalated after BJP MP Nishikant Dubey criticised the Gandhi family, listing books allegedly exposing them. The Chair, citing Rule 349, barred such remarks, prompting further uproar and forcing an adjournment until 5 pm. Congress MPs later met Speaker Om Birla to protest, and demanded Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi be allowed to speak. The disruptions followed uproar since Monday, when Gandhi was prevented from quoting a memoir of former Army chief on the 2020 China standoff. *—PTI*

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K'taka passes resolution against G RAM G

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

The Karnataka Assembly on Wednesday passed a resolution urging the Centre to immediately repeal VB-G RAM G and reinstate MGNREGA amid walkout by the opposition BJP and its ally JD(S).

The resolution was moved by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday, which was accepted by the House today. Opposition Leader R Ashoka said the party opposes the resolution moved by the ruling Congress He also reiterated his party's demand that Excise Minister RB Timmapur should resign as there was a large scale corruption in the Excise Department. After passing the resolution on VB-G RAM G, Speaker UT Khader adjourned the House sine die. *—PTI*

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3 sisters 'die by suicide' over online Korean game

GHAZIABAD, 4 FEB

Three sisters, aged 16, 14 and 12, allegedly addicted to an online Korean task-based "love game," died after jumping from the balcony of their ninth-floor home in the early hours of Wednesday, police said.

Assistant Commissioner of Police Atul Kumar Singh confirmed the sisters were highly involved in the game. Mumbai-based forensic psychologist Deepti Puranik noted that many adolescents increasingly identify with their online avatars, which can dominate their real-life decision-making.

A neighbour recounted witnessing the incident. "I saw the oldest girl sitting on the window ledge, rocking back and forth, with the second sister hugging her. Suddenly, both fell. The youngest, trying to reach them, also toppled," Arun said.

The apparent suicide pact has drawn comparisons to the 2017 Blue Whale challenge, a 50-day online game that allegedly pushed a 14-year-old Mumbai boy to suicide and claimed over 130 lives in Russia and Central Asia. *—PTI*

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NO INJURIES REPORTED

Section of NH-44 caves in at Bengaluru's Attibele

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

- Traffic is crawling, with vehicles diverted to a single lane, resulting in kilometre-long queues of trucks, buses, and cars.

A section of National Highway 44 near Attibele caved in on Tuesday night, disrupting traffic between Bengaluru and Hosur, police said on Wednesday. The stretch, undergoing widening work and excavation for a vehicular overpass, developed a large crater, restricting vehicle movement.

Traffic is crawling, with vehicles diverted to a single lane, resulting in kilometre-long queues of trucks, buses, and cars. Authorities advised commuters to expect long delays and use alternate routes where possible.

Officials attributed the collapse to ongoing road expansion and NHAI projects, citing unstable soil and heavy machinery weakening the surface. Bengaluru Rural District Police said the crater drastically reduced drivable space, prompting frustration among motorists.

No injuries were reported. The affected portion was immediately barricaded as a precaution, given the highway's heavy daily traffic. Authorities, along with NHAI teams, deployed cranes, barriers, and fillers to stabilise the site. A service road has been opened to facilitate smoother traffic flow, while diversions via local roads offer limited relief.

Experts, however, warned that the rains could pose additional risks if fixes are not properly consolidated. *—PTI*

NHAI cordoned the area and started repairs *—SCREENGRAB*

GOOD HEART

PHOTO: SALAR

To celebrate Congress MP KC Venugopal's birthday, Karnataka State Bioenergy Development Board Chairman SE Sudheendra inaugurated a series of programmes for the poor, elderly and orphans at various places in the City on Wednesday

2 Anganwadi officials held for bribes over eggs

KALABURAGI, 4 FEB

Two Anganwadi officials were caught by Lokayukta police on Wednesday while allegedly accepting a bribe linked to the release of egg allowance funds. The accused are Heena, an Anganwadi worker at Station Bazaar Anganwadi Centre, and Pinkubai Gayakwad, an Anganwadi supervisor. Based on a complaint by Saubhagya Balbheem Rathod, Rs 14,490 was credited as egg allowance for three months, of which Rs 6,030 was allegedly demanded as a bribe, which included Rs 4,830 as one month's egg allowance and Rs 600 each for the months of November and December. A Lokayukta team arrested the accused while receiving the amount. —*SALAR NEWS*

Row in Assembly over Excise Dept 'scam'

After overnight dharna in Assembly, LoP demands probe into Rs 6,000cr 'scam'

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Wednesday witnessed an uproar as BJP and JD(S) members protested from the well of the House and demanded the resignation of Excise Minister RB Timmapur over an alleged a multi-crore scam in his department.

The Opposition slept in the Assembly overnight on Tuesday in protest, demanding that Timmapur's resignation over an alleged Rs 6,000 crore scam. Bhajans, religious chants, and sloganeering dominated the overnight agitation.

As the House met for the day on Wednesday, BJP and JD(S) MLAs, who were in the well of the House, shouted slogans. Spearheading the charge, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka alleged that in the Excise Department, bribes are being taken for granting licenses and for facilitating transfers.

The wine merchants' association has levelled the allegations, Ashoka said, adding that related audio recordings have been released. He said he has provided three pen drives in the House containing audio evidence.

Chaos ensued in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Wednesday —*SALAR*

"I urge the Chief Minister to take the Minister's resignation immediately, let there be an inquiry, and after three months if he is proved innocent, take him back," he said, adding that KJ George of Congress and KS Eshwarappa, earlier with BJP, had resigned in the past, following allegations against them.

He also claimed that the "looted money" was being used by the Congress to fund the party in election-bound states.

"Now for Assam polls, Deputy CM DK Shivakumar is the Congress election in-charge and for Kerala KJ George is the in-charge, and the fund used in these elections is the Karnataka Excise Department's. We have been alleging that Congress is using Karnataka as its ATM, but now it is emerging that Karnataka is a Reserve Bank," he claimed. The trigger was the arrest of Excise Deputy Commissioner of the Bengaluru Urban District Jagadeesh Naik and two other officials by the Lokayukta sleuths, while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 25 lakh on 16 January. —*PTI*

> **Corruption is not a new phenomenon in my department**
>
> —RB Timmapur, Excise Minister

Not true, will not resign: Timmapur

Cong asks where is the evidence, says Excise Minister will quit only if he is guilty

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

Excise Minister RB Timmapur on Wednesday said that he would not resign, and termed the Oppositions allegations of corruption a "false and a political conspiracy".

He said he had not done anything wrong and that there was no evidence to support the Opposition's allegations against him. The Opposition's charge stems from an alleged Rs 6,000 crore scam in the Excise Department, highlighted by wine merchant's association.

"Can we run the government if we resign whenever the Opposition demands it? They ask for everyone's resignation, even the Chief Minister's. Should everyone resign? What is the evidence? I will not allow them to defame the government as part of a political conspiracy," Timmapur said.

Speaking to reporters in the City, he said the Opposition was "indulging in wrongdoing, possibly under some pressure."

"Nothing has happened. There is no question of my resigning. I have not done any such wrong thing. There is no evidence for the allegations," he added.

Minister RB Timmapur; Home Minister G Parameshwara —*x*

- Timmapur said that the BJP has not provided any evidence for their allegations, as Parameshwara said the Excise Minister would step down if the charges were proven

The BJP has also claimed that there exists audio purportedly showing Timmapur's complicity in the scams.

The Excise Minister hit back: "Have I spoken in the audio? Has any officer spoken? Did I say anything? All these audios and videos are false."

He said that if officials had done anything wrong, they would be held accountable. "I have taken immediate action against such officials and have suspended them," he added.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said the Opposition was raking up the "fake issue" to avoid discussions on the MGNREGA and VB-G RAM G.

"That is why they are doing some drama. Apart from drama, there is nothing," he said. The Congress government had tabled a resolution against the "repeal" of the MGNREGA in the Assembly on Tuesday.

"Allegations cannot be accepted unless proved otherwise." Home Minister G Parameshwara said, adding that if the BJP provided evidence of the scam, Timmapur would resign. "The Minister himself said (it)".

IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge echoed Parameshwara's claim and said that the BJP was playing to the gallery. They have been protesting for nearly 10 days, Kharge said, but "where is the evidence?" —*AGENCIES*

SHOPKEEPER KILLED OVER CIGARETTE PAYMENT ROW

BELAGAVI, 4 FEB

A heated dispute allegedly sparked by alcohol consumption ended in tragedy on Tuesday night when a shop owner in Belagavi district was killed, police said on Wednesday.

The victim, 48-year-old Yallappa Durgappa Naik, ran a local provision store. According to police, four youths from Kadoli village—Prajjwal Patil, Nikhil Chougale, Vivek Chougale and Shridhar Patil—had attended a fair earlier in the evening and were returning home in an inebriated state. They stopped at Naik's shop to buy a cigarette.

An argument reportedly erupted when Naik insisted that they pay for the purchase. The youths allegedly assaulted him, inflicting severe injuries. Despite efforts to rush him to hospital, Naik succumbed to his injuries on the way.

Acting swiftly, Kakati police apprehended all four accused within half an hour of the incident.

A case has been registered, and investigations are on-going to determine the exact circumstances surrounding the assault. —*PTI*

Metro fares may be hiked by Rs 1-5 on 9 February

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

Bengaluru Metro is likely to increase passenger fares by Rs 1 to Rs 5 from 9 February, despite continuing public backlash over last year's steep hike of up to 71 percent.

Officials said the annual fare revision recommended by the Fare Fixation Committee (FFC) last year is binding on the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL). The committee had mandated that the automatic annual fare fixation formula be implemented until a new FFC is constituted.

At present, Bengaluru Metro charges a minimum fare of Rs 10 for distances up to 2km and a maximum fare of Rs 90 for journeys exceeding 25km, making it the costliest metro system in the country. With a 5 per cent annual increase, the minimum fare may rise to Rs 11, while the maximum could touch Rs 95.

According to the FFC report, the annual revision comes into effect every year from the date the recommended fares are implemented and remains valid until the next committee's recommendations are enforced. The increase is calculated using a prescribed formula or capped at five percent, whichever is lower.

An official said the revision would take effect from 9 February without government approval, but commuters called it unfair after last year's hike of up to 71 percent.

BMRCL has argued that regular fare revisions are essential for sustainability. Without annual adjustments, the corporation estimates losses could reach Rs 577 crore by 2029–30. —*Agencies*

BJP leader wants to jail citizens seeking quota

KALABURAGI, 4 FEB

A video of the defeated BJP candidate from Chittapur Assembly constituency, Manikanth Rathod, saying "If I come to power, I will put those who demand reservation in jail," has gong viral on social media, drawing sharp criticism from the public.

The widely circulated video, shared on a Facebook page titled "Manikanth Rathod BJP," showed him claiming that given a chance to become the Prime Minister he would perform such a "miracle" that people from countries like the United States and Britain would come seeking Indian citizenship.

To make this possible, he claims, the reservation system in the country must be changed. Reservation, he says, should be provided only to the poor, and caste-based reservation should be abolished.

He added that reservation being implemented in the country is caste based and must first be scrapped. Instead, he says, benefits should be distributed to the poor, ensuring that the wealthy do not receive these. If this is done, he claims, India will shine on the world stage within the next ten years, and the value of the Indian rupee will surpass the US dollar.

The BJP leader also said in the video that those who identify themselves by caste should not be granted Indian citizenship, and that those who demand reservation will be sent to jail. —*SALAR NEWS*

'IS MODI COMPROMISED?'

A demonstrator from the National Students Union of India wears a mask of US President Donald Trump and holds a monkey wearing a mask of Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Wednesday. The protest alleged that Modi had compromised India's interests in the US trade deal. Protesters also claimed that Modi was allegedly named in the 'Epstein Files' PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Explosives seized from residential layout in B'luru

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

Bengaluru police on Wednesday seized explosives that were allegedly being used illegally to break stone boulders inside a residential layout, raising safety concerns among local residents.

Acting on a tip-off, Hulimavu police inspected a site in Akshayanagar on Tuesday after receiving a complaint that blasting activity was damaging nearby buildings. Based on the complaint, a case was registered.

A senior police officer said the inspection was carried out along with the bomb disposal squad. During the search, police recovered four bags of stone crusher powder weighing 20kg each, totalling about 80kg, along with 20 gel explosive sticks and 30 live detonator cables.

Police also seized a tractor, a construction vehicle and a digging machine from the spot.

Officials said the explosives were being used without authorisation in a densely populated area, posing serious risk to residents and property.

Further investigation is under way to identify those responsible and trace the source of the explosives. —*PTI*

Man booked for walking nude in City

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

A man has been booked for allegedly creating a public nuisance after a video circulated on social media showing him naked on a busy city road, police said on Wednesday. The incident occurred on 2 February, outside a private club on Lavelle Road.

According to authorities, the man had arrived at the club and argued with security personnel, claiming his father was a member and demanding entry. When he was refused, he reportedly stripped naked and caused a disturbance outside the premises.

In the video, the man can be seen clinging to the bonnet of a red car, blocking its path. He later falls to the road as the driver manoeuvres to move forward. The footage quickly went viral, drawing public attention and concern.

Police said it has yet to be verified whether the man was under the influence of alcohol or experiencing any mental health issues. Two FIRs have been registered. —*PTI*

Nothing given to the State in Budget: Congress

MYSURU, 4 FEB

Karnataka Pradesha Congress Committee (KPCC) spokesperson M Lakshman on Wednesday terming Union Budget 2026-27 as faceless, baseless and visionless, lashed out at the Centre for giving "empty vessels" to the State.

"The Union government ought to return 41 percent of the tax it collected from the State back to the State in accordance with the Finance Commission recommendations. But the Centre has allocated only Rs 60,000 crores to the State instead of 2.2 lakh crores as recommended by the commission," M Lakshman charged at a press conference here at the Congress Bhawan here.

—FB

Lakshman said the State government has been paying Rs 5.26 lakh crores as nine different types of taxes to the union government every year. He alleged that injustice is being meted out to the state by the Centre in the allocation of grants and funds when compared to other BJP ruled states.

Although Uttara Pradesh paid Rs 6 lakh crores rupees in tax to the centre, the Union government returned 2.2 lakh crore to that state . It provided 1.1 lakh crores to Madhya Pradesh which paid 2.6 lakh crore taxes, he noted, alleging impariality.

He said that the State was the second highest tax contributer after Maharashtra.

He also flayed the Centre for turning a blind eye to the state government's request for funds for irrigation projects like Upper Bhadra project and Upper Krishna project.

"India's total debt outstanding since 2014 has now increased to over four times to Rs 218. 6 lakh crores in the 12 years of the Modi government," the Congress spokesman added. —*SALAR NEWS*

MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES

Tele MANAS integrated with Namma 112

NIMHANS Director Dr Pratima & City Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh, on Wednesday —MOHAMMED ASAD

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

Bengaluru police on Wednesday integrated the Tele MANAS mental health helpline with Namma 112, the Emergency Response Support System, to ensure quicker and coordinated responses to psychiatric emergencies, including suicide risk, officials said.

The integration enables seamless transfer of distress calls between Namma 112 and Tele MANAS (14416), allowing callers to receive either emergency intervention or specialised mental health support without delay.

The inauguration event was presided over by Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh and Dr Pratima Murthy, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS).

The collaboration marks a significant step in improving crisis-time mental health services by linking first responders with trained mental health professionals.

"Timely assistance will be provided to individuals experiencing mental health distress.

Psychiatric emergencies, including suicide risk, can be managed promptly in coordination with Namma 112, while mental health-related calls received by Namma 112 will be transferred to Tele MANAS (14416) for specialised management," the police statement said.

Officials said the initiative aims to ensure faster response, coordination and humane, compassionate care for people in distress, while reducing the burden on emergency responders. —*PTI*

12 get 5 yrs RI for stripping woman

BELAGAVI, 4 FEB

A Belagavi court on Wednesday sentenced 12 convicts to five years of rigorous imprisonment along with fines for stripping and assaulting a woman in public at Hosa Vantamuri village of Belagavi taluk.

The verdict was delivered by the Additional 10th District and Sessions Court after charges against the accused were proved under various sections of law. The convicts are Basappa Naik, Raju Naik, Kempanna Naik, Parvati Naik, Yallavva Naik, Lakkappa Naik, Gangavva Naik, Sangeeta Hegganaik, Santosh Naik, Shobha Naik, Lakkavva Naik and Shivappa Vannur.

-FREEPIK

Emotional scenes were witnessed inside the courtroom as the accused and their family members broke down after the judgment was pronounced.

On 10 December, 2023, a young man from Hosa Vantamuri village eloped with a woman he was in love with. The news about the affair spread rapidly in the village, triggering outrage among residents.

Later that day, members of the woman's family and others allegedly attacked the youth's house, stripped and assaulted his mother and tied her to an electric pole. They later paraded her nude in full public view. No one dared to help her until women local police came to her rescue.

Police filed a charge-sheet against 13 persons, including a juvenile. After a trial lasting nearly two years, the court found 12 of the accused guilty. —*SALAR NEWS*

Teacher wearing churidar not allowed in Kerala

KOLLAM, 4 FEB

A headmistress of an aided school in Kottarakara was on Wednesday denied entry for wearing a churidar, officials said. She was stopped at the gate around 9am by security staff on the school manager's instructions, according to the District Education Office (DEO). The headmistress called the police and was allowed inside only after officers arrived. Television visuals showed her sitting outside the gate with eggs meant for the mid-day meal scheme. Police said she has filed a complaint and her statement is being recorded. She alleged the manager had earlier asked women teachers not to wear churidars. The manager has not commented. Officials said the manager had no authority to bar her entry and government rules permit churidars in schools. —*PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Gehlot slams Khejri trees cutting for development

JAIPUR, 4 FEB

Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday termed the large-scale felling of khejri trees in the name of development "extremely unfortunate" and urged the state government to hold immediate talks with protesters. Referring to the ongoing Khejri Bachao Andolan in Bikaner, now in its third day, Gehlot said the agitation had grown into a mass movement

Environmentalists and members of Bishnoi community are on an indefinite hunger strike, demanding a Tree Protection Act and a complete ban on cutting khejri trees. Calling the khejri a symbol of Rajasthan's identity and faith, Gehlot recalled the sacrifice of Amrita Devi Bishnoi and 363 others, stressing the need to take environmental concerns seriously. —*PTI*

PM to visit Malaysia on 7-8 Feb

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Malaysia from 7–8 February to bolster ties in trade, investment, energy, and maritime security. This is his third trip to Malaysia and the first since the India-Malaysia relationship was upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in August 2024. Modi will hold bilateral talks with Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim, meet the Indian diaspora, and engage with industry and business leaders. The 10th India-Malaysia CEO Forum will coincide with his visit. The Ministry of External Affairs noted the nations' strong historical and cultural links, and the 2.9 million-strong Indian community in Malaysia. Leaders are expected to review cooperation across defence, technology, healthcare, education, and tourism. —*PTI*

Gogoi accuses Himanta of owning 12,000 bighas land

GUWAHATI, 4 FEB

Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday accused Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his family of grabbing nearly 12,000 bighas (over 3,960 acres) of land across the state. Addressing a press conference, Gogoi said a Congress investigation had revealed large-scale land occupation and claimed the figure could rise as the probe continues. He alleged Sarma had revived claims about his supposed Pakistan links to divert attention from the issue. Questioning the timing, Gogoi said the Chief Minister had stayed silent for months after promising to reveal evidence. He added that the Congress is preparing a dossier on alleged corruption. The BJP did not immediately respond. —*PTI*

India to cut US agri goods tariffs to 0%: USTR

However, Goyal says agri sector will be protected

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 4 FEB

Union Minister Piyush Goyal speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Wednesday —*PTI*

India will lower tariffs on a "vast array" of American industrial and agricultural goods to zero per cent under the trade deal, a top US official said.

Meanwhile, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal assured Parliament that the country's core sensitivities in food and agriculture have been fully safeguarded in the India-US trade deal, and the pact will enhance export competitiveness in the American market.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer described the deal as a "big win" while noting that India will continue to control "certain key areas" that enjoy protection.

Greer said the US will continue to maintain some level of tariff against India - 18 per cent - "because we have this giant trade deficit with them, but they've also agreed to reduce their tariffs for us on a variety of agricultural products, manufactured goods, chemicals, medical devices, etc. It's an exciting opportunity for both countries."

Additionally, several Opposition had been asking the government to make a statement in Parliament following the announcement of the deal by US President Donald Trump on Monday and later PM Narendra Modi's social media message in this regard.

Meanwhile, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge questioned the manner in which the Indo-US trade deal was announced at a time Parliament was in session, and asked whether India had compromised in any manner under US "pressure". He also asked whether India has agreed to zero tariffs on US imports. —*PTI*

Oppn mulls impeaching CEC over SIR: Congress

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

The Opposition will take a call on moving an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, Congress leader K C Venugopal said on Wednesday.

Banerjee, who was in Delhi as part of her campaign against the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise in West Bengal, called for Kumar's impeachment. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav also extended support to her.

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, however, refused to comment on the matter.

Venugopal said they are "positively" looking at the suggestion.

Banerjee also appeared in the Supreme Court on Wednesday and argued her petition against the SIR exercise, alleging unfair targeting of West Bengal by the poll panel and bulldozing of its citizens.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi stressed that transparency should be maintained by the Election Commission.

The Trinamool supremo's remarks came a day after she, along with her delegation, walked out of a meeting with Kumar and other election commissioners on the SIR issue, alleging that the poll panel chief showed arrogance and humiliated them.

She claimed that the names of several people who vote for Trinamool Congress have been removed.

The process for impeaching the CEC is possible only on the grounds of proven misbehaviour or incapacity.

Such a motion introduced in either House of Parliament must be passed by a majority of its total membership and a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting. —*PTI*

T'gana Speaker rejects BRS MLA's disqualification plea

HYDERABAD, 4 FEB

Telangana Legislative Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar on Wednesday dismissed a petition filed by the BRS seeking disqualification of its Jagtial MLA M Sanjay Kumar, bringing relief to the legislator.

Confirming the decision, the Speaker told PTI that the plea had been rejected.

The BRS had moved disqualification petitions in 2024 against Sanjay Kumar and nine other MLAs, alleging they defected to the ruling Congress after being elected on a BRS ticket in the 2023 Assembly elections.

The Speaker has earlier dismissed similar petitions against seven other BRS MLAs.

Reacting to the order, Sanjay Kumar said media reports in 2024 claiming he had joined the Congress were incorrect.

He said he had met Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy only for "development purposes". —*PTI*

'FADNAVIS HAS NO RIGHT TO COMMENT ON NCP MERGER'

BARAMATI/PUNE, 4 FEB

NCP (SP) Chief **Sharad Pawar** on Wednesday said Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had no right to comment on merger talks between rival NCP factions, asserting he was not involved in the discussions.

Speaking in Baramati, Pawar said the talks were led by NCP (SP) leader Jayant Patil and late Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who died in a plane crash on 28 January.

"If he was nowhere in the talks, what right does he have to mention my name?" Pawar said, rejecting Fadnavis's claim that Ajit Pawar would have informed him if reunification was imminent.

Pawar added that the immediate priority is mutual support among leaders, not fresh political negotiations.

Amid speculation, Pawar held a closed-door meeting with Ajit Pawar's sons, Parth and Jay Pawar, at Vidya Pratishthan in Baramati.

Sources said discussions may have touched on a possible merger and upcoming Zilla Parishad polls.

Meanwhile, Fadnavis said the government would consider a demand to rename the Ladki Bahin welfare scheme after Ajit Pawar, calling it one of several proposals.

Separately, a relative released an audio claiming Ajit Pawar spoke minutes before the crash, highlighting his "inclusive approach" towards community representation. —*PTI*

2-TIME BJP LEGISLATOR

Manipur's new CM is RSS stalwart & Taekwondo black belt

IMPHAL, 4 FEB

BJP legislator Yumnam Khemchand Singh with Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, in Imphal, Manipur, on Wednesday —*PTI*

Two-time BJP legislator Yumnam Khemchand Singh, who was sworn in as the Manipur Chief Minister on Wednesday, is a long-time RSS functionary and an organisation-focused leader who has held key constitutional and ministerial positions in the state.

Apart from politics, he has had a long association with Taekwondo. A black belt holder, he is a former vice-president of the Taekwondo Federation of India and has been involved in the promotion of the sport in the Northeast.

Though Singh has been in politics for decades, the 62-year-old leader made his debut in the Assembly in 2017 from Singjamei constituency in Imphal West district.

Singh was elected Speaker of the Assembly, a position he held during the first Biren Singh-led BJP government in the state.

In 2022, he was inducted into the second Biren Singh ministry as a Cabinet Minister and held key portfolios, including municipal administration, housing and urban development (MAHUD), rural development and panchayati raj, and education departments.

He served in the Cabinet till February 2025, when President's rule was imposed in the state, days after N Biren Singh resigned as the chief minister amid criticisms of his government's handling of the ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kukis, which broke out in May 2023. —*PTI*

'GOVT CLAIMS BOOK DOES NOT EXIST'

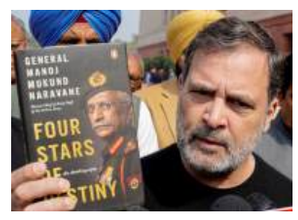
Rahul to gift Naravane memoir to Modi

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said he would gift Prime Minister Narendra Modi a copy of former Army chief MM Naravane's unreleased memoir if he came to Parliament, accusing the Prime Minister of shirking responsibility during the 2020 India-China border clash.

Addressing reporters at the Parliament House complex, Gandhi held up the memoir, saying it exists despite repeated government claims to the contrary. "The Speaker, the Defence Minister, the government have all said this book does not exist. Every youngster in India should know it exists," he said.

Gandhi cited the book to allege that during the Ladakh standoff, the Army chief sought guidance from Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and the Prime Minister, but received no clear instructions. According to Gandhi, Modi told Naravane, "jo uchit samjho woh karo" – effectively leaving the army to make critical decisions independently. He added that Naravane felt abandoned by the entire establishment.



"The country is asking questions, and the government is running away from answering them," Gandhi said, asserting that the government feared him raising the issue in Parliament.

He also lodged a formal protest with Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla over being disallowed from speaking on the matter, calling it a "blot on our democracy" and the first instance in history when the Leader of the Opposition was barred from addressing the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address.

Gandhi said he wanted Indian youth to see the memoir, which, he claimed, provides a full account of the army's actions and government inaction during the border crisis. —*PTI*

Bihar has become a land of many living dead and we don't want this disease to spread across the country ... EC is surely facilitating the spread of this disease

-Kamal Haasan, RS MP attacks SIR in his debut speech

RAHUL CALLS BITTU 'TRAITOR', MINISTER SNAPS BACK

>>>CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As Bittu walked past protesting Congress MPs, Gandhi was heard saying, "Here is a traitor walking right by. Look at the face." He then extended his hand towards Bittu, adding, "Hello brother, my traitor friend. Don't worry, you will come back (to Congress)."

Bittu declined to shake hands and responded sharply, calling Gandhi a "desh ke dushman" (enemy of the nation), as the two leaders briefly exchanged words.

Bittu, a three-time MP from the Congress who joined the BJP ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections

Rahul was trying to speak after standing in solidarity with the suspended party MPs, mainly from Punjab, at the main entrance which MPs take to enter the new Parliament building. They were also heard saying, "Surrender, surrender".

Bittu later called Rahul Sonia Gandhi's "bigda hua beta" (spoilt child), and asked, "Why didn't he say such a thing to so many other MPs, but only to a Sikh?"

"They (Gandhis) think they are the biggest 'deshbhakts' (patriots) as his father (Rajiv Gandhi) had sacrificed his life. I had this fight in the party. My grandfather, Beant Singh, was martyred in Punjab due to the fire (of terrorism) ignited by the Gandhi family," he said.

"Your hands are soaked in blood of Sikhs killed during anti-Sikh riots," he said, adding that he did not go to their room either and was entering Parliament. "This Sardar will never join hands with the scion of the Gandhi family, which is a murderer of Sikhs and demolished gurdwaras," Bittu said. Asked if he would rejoin Congress, Bittu retorted, "Return, my foot." Bittu said this matter will have to be taken up with the Speaker as he is the custodian. Four BJP Sikh leaders, including Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri, alleged at a press conference that Gandhi's remarks reflected his mindset and his family's deep-seated hatred against Sikhs. —*PTI*

Kerala passes resolution to stop Centre neglecting state

T'PURAM, 4 FEB

The Kerala Assembly on Wednesday passed a resolution urging the central government to stop its alleged "neglect towards the state and to accept its rightful demands".

The resolution moved by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was passed by the House in the absence of the Congress-led UDF opposition.

The CM, while reading out the resolution in the Assembly, said that the Union government was "neglecting" Kerala's needs and was "discriminating" against it.

He said that no country can stand tall by weakening its states, but the central government was not giving any consideration to many of the reasonable demands put forward by Kerala in the last few years. He said this was evident from the fact that there was no mention in the Union Budget about

setting up an AIIMS or implementing a high-speed rail corridor in Kerala, both of which are needed in the state.

"It is a major setback for Kerala. In addition to this, the allocation for the rural employment scheme in the Union Budget for 2026-27 has been reduced from the earlier Rs 88,000 crore to Rs 30,000 crore. The cut of Rs 58,000 crore in the national level allocation for the scheme, which Kerala is laudably implementing, will seriously affect the state," he said. —*PTI*

Revanth has reached peak of appeasement politics: BJP Prez

HYDERABAD, 4 FEB

BJP president Nitin Nabin on Wednesday alleged that Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has reached the peak of "appeasement politics" and also suppressed Telugu language and culture.

Referring to Reddy's remarks of 'Congress means Muslims and Muslims means Congress' in November last year, Nabin said the comments hurt the country's culture and 'Sanatani' traditions.

"The CM's comments also show that Congress works only for Muslim vote-bank politics, not for the people. The people of Telangana and Telugu-speaking people mean nothing to them," he slammed the grand old party.

Nabin said the Waqf Board in Telangana has become one of the richest boards in the country, owning nearly 77,000 acres of land. —*PTI*

AIADMK promises pension hikes

CHENNAI, 4 FEB

AIADMK General Secretary **Edappadi K Palaniswami** on Wednesday released the party's second set of poll promises, announcing a hike in social security pensions and several welfare measures ahead of the State elections.

In a statement, Palaniswami said the monthly assistance under the social security pension scheme would be raised from Rs 1,200 to Rs 2,000 if the AIADMK forms the government. The enhanced pension would apply to senior citizens, widows, destitute persons, the differently abled and transgender persons.

As a livelihood support measure, the party promised three free LPG gas cylinders every year to ration card holders. Reiterating an earlier assurance, Palaniswami said the family of a bull-tamer who loses his life during Jallikattu would receive Rs 10 lakh as compensation, while those injured would be given Rs 2 lakh.

To encourage the traditional sport, the AIADMK also promised a subsidy of Rs 5 lakh to organise Jallikattu events at government-authorised venues. The party said the existing online registration system for participants would be scrapped and the earlier manual process restored.

The second list of assurances also includes a waiver of education loans and interest-free loans for women from minority communities to start businesses. —*PTI*

Sengottaiyan to contest from Gobichettipalayam again

TVK leader KA Sengottaiyan on Wednesday said that he wanted to contest from Gobichettipalayam Assembly constituency again, and would submit his willingness petition with the party head on Friday He said he was confident that TVK will get majority seats in the upcoming Assembly elections in the state and would form a government. The nine-time AIADMK MLA, expelled from the party in 2025, joined TVK. —*PTI*

Anbumani seeks probe into ₹700 cr road project scam

PMK leader Anbumani Ramadoss on Wednesday demanded a CBI probe into alleged "Rs 700 crore scam" in awarding of a contract for the construction of 14.20-km four-lane Thiruvanmiyur-Uthandi elevated road along Chennai's East Coast Road. The Madras High Court passed an interim order staying issuance of the work order to Hyderabad-based KNR Constructions. —*PTI*

21 farmer suicides in Maharashtra district in January

NAGPUR, 4 FEB

Yavatmal district in eastern Maharashtra recorded 21 farmer suicides in January, officials confirmed on Wednesday, renewing concerns over the agrarian crisis in the region. Activist Kishore Tiwari, former head of the state-run Vasantrao Naik Sheti Swavlamban Mission, blamed successive governments for failing to address core issues such as rising input costs, inadequate irrigation, soil degradation, poor procurement and lack of storage facilities. Western Vidarbha, a major cotton and soybean belt, has reported farmer suicides since 1998. Tiwari urged a long-term credit policy and incentives to shift farmers away from cash crops. *—PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

Minor among 3 held for stabbing youth in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

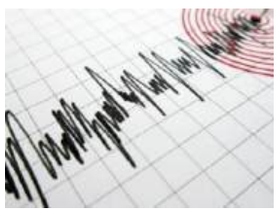
Delhi Police have apprehended a juvenile and arrested two men for the fatal stabbing of a 20-year-old youth in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar area, officials said on Wednesday. The victim, Shivam, was stabbed multiple times on 2 February, following a personal dispute linked to an alleged relationship involving the juvenile's sister. Police said Shivam was rushed to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital but was declared dead. An eyewitness statement led to the registration of a case and the formation of multiple police teams. CCTV footage and technical surveillance helped trace the suspects. Two accused, Akshat alias Hunny, 24 and Maniah, 19, were arrested, while the juvenile was apprehended. A knife suspected to be the murder weapon has been recovered. *—PTI*

—ANI

Malkangiri now naxal-free as top Maoist surrenders

MALKANGIRI, 4 FEB

Odisha's Malkangiri district, once regarded as a Maoist stronghold, was declared "Naxal-free" on Wednesday following the surrender of senior rebel Sukhram Markam, police said. Markam, an area committee member of the banned CPI (Maoist) with a bounty of Rs 21 lakh, surrendered before police and handed over an SLR rifle, ammunition and other items, Malkangiri Superintendent of Police Binod Patil H said. The announcement comes days after neighbouring Nabrangpur was declared Maoist-free. Police said Markam, also known as Suresh or Yogesh, was involved in violent activities across Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh but has now renounced extremism.*—PTI*



—PIXABAY

4.1 earthquake jolts Arunachal's West Kameng

ITANAGAR, 4 FEB

A 4.1-magnitude earthquake struck Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district on Wednesday morning, officials said. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage to property. The National Centre for Seismology said the tremor occurred at 8.57am at a depth of 5km. Nyelam Sunil, a technical officer with the Centre for Earth Science and Himalayan Studies in Itanagar, described the quake as mild. Authorities said the situation is being monitored and no loss of life has been reported so far. *—PTI*

IN SC, DIDI CALLS EC WHATSAPP COMMISSION

SC issues notice to EC as Mamata alleges WB is being targeted

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday described the Election Commission as the "WhatsApp commission" while personally arguing her petition in the Supreme Court against the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

She claimed instructions to electoral officials were being passed via WhatsApp, bypassing proper procedures.

Banerjee, dressed in her signature white sari with a black scarf, reached the Supreme Court with senior advocates including Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee around 10 am. Several lawyers and litigants jostled to enter the CJI's courtroom to catch a glimpse of the CM making her arguments. She sought permission to speak for five minutes, but Chief Justice Surya Kant allowed her 15 minutes to make her submissions.

Highlighting the urgency of the exercise, Banerjee said the SIR process, which normally takes two years, was being rushed into three months during the festival and harvest season. She alleged that many people alive had been declared dead and flagged deaths of officials involved in the exercise. She criticised the issuance of notices over minor discrepancies such as name spellings and said married women were being targeted for shifting to in-laws' homes or using their husband's surname.

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee reaches the Supreme Court premises, in New Delhi *—PTI*

Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, representing the EC, countered that the West Bengal government had provided only 80 Class-II officers for the SIR process and relied heavily on lower-ranked employees like Anganwadi workers. Banerjee refuted this, saying the state had complied with all requests.The Supreme Court has sought responses from the Election Commission by 9 February and directed the West Bengal government to submit a list of Class-II officers for deputation in the revision process.

Quoting Rabindranath Tagore, she said, "The problem is our lawyers always fought our case from the beginning but when everything is finished, we are not getting justice. When justice is behind doors, we are not getting justice anywhere. I am a bonded labourer sir... I am from a common family and I am not fighting for my party."

The Chief Justice instructed the EC to ensure booth-level officers are sensitive while issuing notices and stressed that "genuine persons must remain on the electoral roll." Banerjee concluded by thanking the bench and urging it to "save democracy." *—PTI*

SC flags Wangchuk's ill health, asks govt to rethink detention

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre if the government would relook at the detention of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk considering his health condition.

The court observed that Wangchuk's health report was not good and asked additional solicitor general KM Nataraj, appearing for the Centre, to seek instructions in the matter.

Nataraj submitted that Wangchuk had been responsible for violence in Leh in 2025 in which four people died and 161 were injured. His detention was approved on 3 October and it was not challenged.

The Centre and the Union Territory of Ladakh administration had told the apex court that Wangchuk was detained for instigating people in a border area where regional sensitivity is involved.

The Centre had said that Wangchuk tried to instigate Gen Z for protests like in Nepal and Bangladesh and referred to Arab Spring-like agitation which has led to the overthrow of multiple governments.

SC was hearing a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, Wangchuk's wife, against his detention under the stringent National Security Act.

Wangchuk, who is lodged in the Jodhpur Central Jail, denied the allegastions, emphasising that he has the democratic right to criticise and protest.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Angmo, submitted that police have relied on "borrowed material" and selective videos to mislead the detaining authority.

Angmo claims the detention is illegal and an arbitrary exercise violating his fundamental rights.

Wangchuk himself condemned the violence through his social media handles and said violence would lead to the failure of Ladakh's "tapasya" and peaceful pursuit, Angmo said. *—PTI*

OPERATION 'KIYA'

Two JeM terrorists killed in Udhampur

JAMMU, 4 FEB

Two Pakistani terrorists, including a self-styled top commander of the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), were killed on Wednesday after security forces trapped them inside a cave in the Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.

The over 20-hour joint operation, codenamed 'Kiya' by the Army, was carried out in the higher reaches of the Ramnagar–Basantgarh area following specific intelligence inputs. Contact with the terrorists was established around 4pm on Tuesday, triggering a fierce gunfight that continued until the final assault on Wednesday morning.

Officials identified one of the slain terrorists as Rubani alias Abu Mavia, a self-styled JeM commander active in the region for several years. One body was found at the mouth of the cave, while the other was recovered from deep inside.

"Based on specific intelligence input provided by police, troops of Counter-Intelligence Force Delta, White Knight Corps planned and executed a focused joint counter-terror operation in coordination with police and CRPF," the Army's White Knight Corps said on X. It added that "following a calibrated and coordinated response, two terrorists have been successfully neutralised".

Rubani alias Abu Mavia

Several powerful explosions were heard when troops stormed the cave around noon. A large cache of arms and ammunition, including an M4 carbine and an AK assault rifle, was recovered.

Officials said the terrorists were injured during an intense exchange of fire in the Jophar forest belt and retreated into the cave. Attempts to flee on Tuesday night were foiled, with paratroopers, dog squads and drones deployed.

The operation has concluded, but remains under surveillance. *—PTI*

AI completes fuel switch checks on Boeing 787, no issues found

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

Air India on Wednesday said it has completed precautionary inspections of fuel control switches (FCS) across all operational Boeing 787 aircraft in its fleet, and no issues were detected.

The checks followed a defect reported by a pilot on Monday on a Boeing 787-8 that operated a flight from London Heathrow to Bengaluru on Sunday with over 200 passengers. The aircraft was grounded for inspection as a precaution.

Air India, which currently has 33 Dreamliners with 28 operational, said the re-inspections were carried out "in an abundance of caution" after the pilot's observation. "No issues were identified during these checks. We acknowledge the regulator's proactive oversight in conducting independent inspections and subsequently clearing the FCS," the airline said.

The airline also stated it would comply with the regulator's guidance to circulate Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) recommended procedures for FCS operation to all crew members.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had earlier found that the "apparently correct procedure" was not followed by the crew in operating the switch and directed Air India to ensure compliance.

The fuel control switch has been under scrutiny since the crash of an Air India Boeing 787-8 last June, which killed 260 people. The preliminary probe report indicated that fuel supply was cut off shortly after take-off, highlighting the importance of correct FCS operation.

Air India emphasised that the inspections reaffirmed the safety of its Boeing 787 fleet. *—PTI*

Thick fog blankets Delhi; air quality very poor

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Delhi woke up to dense fog on Wednesday, with poor visibility disrupting movement of vehicles.

The city's Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 319 at 9 am, placing it in the 'very poor' category.

According to the CPCB, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 to 100 'satisfactory', 101 to 200 'moderate', 201 to 300 'poor', 301 to 400 'very poor', and 401 to 500 'severe'.

The minimum temperature at Safdarjung, the city's base station, settled at 8.2 degrees Celsius, 0.2 notch below the season's normal, according to IMD. *—PTI*

Anurag Kashyap named in Epstein Files

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap's name has surfaced in the recently released Epstein Files, drawing online attention, though the documents contain no evidence linking him to any criminal activity involving the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The files, released by the US Department of Justice, consist of emails and correspondence connected to Epstein and include references to numerous global public figures, many without any established connection to his crimes. Kashyap is mentioned in a set of emails in which he is described as a "famous Bollywood director" and referred to as the "Bollywood guy".

According to reports, the references appear in exchanges between Epstein and individuals including Giuseppe Bersani, Gino Yu and Ornella Corazza. The correspondence discussed potential gatherings related to workshops and congresses focused on Buddhism, technology and medicine, including a proposed event in Shanghai. Kashyap's name appears alongside figures such as Ben Goertzel, Bruce Damer and DJ Spooky. Other Indian names also appear in the files. Actor and filmmaker Nandita Das was mentioned in connection with the Lake District Festival in England, where Epstein was invited and Das was listed as a speaker. *—Agencies*

Bail allowed if minor near 18 yrs in 'relationship': HC

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

The Delhi High Court granted bail to a man accused under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, holding that while a minor's consent has no legal value, the romantic nature of the relationship and the prosecutrix's age nearing 18 are relevant at the bail stage.

Justice Vikas Mahajan granted bail to Varun Kumar Singh, arrested in August 2023 under IPC Sections 363, 366A and 376 and Section 4 of the POCSO Act. The prosecution alleged Singh took the prosecutrix, aged around 14, to Agra and established physical relations. The minor stated she accompanied him voluntarily. With no school records, a bone ossification test assessed her age as above 14 but below 17 years.

Relying on a division bench ruling, the Court held that when age is determined through ossification tests, the upper end of the range should be considered, and treated the prosecutrix as 17 years old.

"Undoubtedly, the prosecutrix was minor... but taking her age as 17 years, it prima facie appears she was of sufficient maturity," the Court said, noting absence of violence or coercion. It also noted all material witnesses were examined and Singh spent over two years in custody.

BAIL DENIED IN COERCION AND EXPLOITATION CASE

In contrast, the High Court recently refused bail in a case of alleged sexual exploitation through threats to circulate intimate videos. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma held that consent to a relationship does not extend to recording intimate content or using it for blackmail, adding that marital status or profession cannot weaken such allegations. *—Agencies*

Court reserves order on bail to Potty in Sabarimala case

KOLLAM, 4 FEB

A vigilance court here on Wednesday reserved its order on granting statutory bail to prime accused Unnikrishnan Potty in the second case of alleged misappropriation of gold from the Dwarapalaka (guardian deity) idols of the Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple.

Earlier, a senior lawyer had said that Potty was granted the statutory bail.

Bengaluru-based businessman Potty had on 21 January secured statutory bail in the case related to alleged misappropriation of gold from the door frames of temple's Sreekovil (sanctum sanctorum).

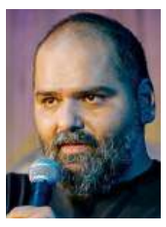
Public prosecutor Siju Rajan, representing the SIT, opposed the grant of bail to Potty.

Similar reliefs have already been obtained by former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) administrative officers B Murari Babu and S Sreekumar as the chargesheet was not filed within the stipulated time. *—PTI*

Traitor barb: M'rashtra panel summons Kamra

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

The Maharashtra Legislative Council's privileges committee has summoned stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sushma Andhare for a hearing over alleged insulting remarks against Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.



BJP MLC Prasad Lad, chairperson of the committee, said notices were issued to both around 15 days ago.] They have been asked to appear before the committee at 2pm on Thursday. Lad said if they fail to appear despite two summons, the panel will decide on further action.

The breach of privilege notice was moved by BJP MLC Pravin Darekar, who accused Kamra and Andhare of making derogatory remarks against Shinde, whose Shiv Sena faction is part of the BJP-led Mahayuti government.

Kamra, known for his comedy, had targeted Shinde in a song parody last year, indirectly referring to him as a traitor without naming him. Andhare publicly supported the comedian.

Shinde led a rebellion against then chief minister Uddhav Thackeray in June 2022, triggering a split in the Shiv Sena and the collapse of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government.

The matter has sparked debate statewide. *—PTI.*

GHAZAIBAD HORROR

3 sisters, obsessed with phone game, die by suicide

GHAZIABAD, 4 FEB

Three sisters aged 16, 14 and 12 died after allegedly jumping from the ninth floor of a high-rise in Ghaziabad in the early hours of Wednesday, police said, linking the incident to severe addiction to an online Korean game.

The girls — Nishika, Prachi, and Pakhi, daughters of Chetan Kumar — lived in a flat in Bharat City under the Teela Mor police station limits in Sahibabad. Police said they received information around 2.15 am that three girls had jumped from the balcony of a ninth-floor apartment. The sisters were found on the ground floor and were declared dead on arrival at a hospital in Loni.

Assistant Commissioner of Police Atul Kumar Singh said preliminary investigations suggested the girls were addicted to a Korean task-based interactive "love game" and were obsessed with gaming on their mobile phones. Deputy Commissioner of Police Nimish Patil said they were heavily influenced by Korean content and spent long hours on their phones.

According to police, family members had restricted the girls' mobile phone use in recent days, leaving them distressed. "This may have triggered the decision to take the extreme step," Patil said.

The sisters reportedly became addicted to online gaming during the Covid-19 period and did almost everything together, including studying, eating and sleeping. Police said their schooling had been irregular and they had not attended school for the past two years.

Investigators recovered a diary containing material related to the incident. A note read, "Read everything written in this diary, it is all here," followed by a crying-face emoji and a handwritten apology saying, "Sorry papa, I am really sorry."

Their father said he was unaware the game involved tasks or instructions. "If I had known, no father would allow this," he said, adding that the girls had spoken of wanting to go to Korea. *—PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

A SLOW BURN

A tanker carrying flamable gas overturned at the Khandala Ghat section of the Mumbai-Pune Expressway on Tuesday evening, crippling traffic for over 24 hours, on Wednesday. Officials said a total of 163 Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) were stranded, and 139 bus services were canclled due the jam —*PTI*

Military-backed party wins Myanmar polls

Myanmar's military-backed party emerged the winner of an election, final official figures showed Wednesday, as the country's army chief signed a law authorising a new consultative body that could allow him to retain influence without formally leading the new government.

The victory of the Union Solidarity and Development Party, or USDP, led by former generals, was widely expected after the vote excluded major opposition parties and sharply restricted dissent.

The constitution guarantees 25 per cent of parliamentary seats for the military, effectively ensuring control by the armed forces and allied parties.

Senior **Gen Min Aung Hlaing**, head of the military government, was widely expected to assume the presidency when the new Parliament convenes. The constitution, however, bars a President from serving concurrently as the Army's Commander-in-chief — the country's most powerful post — raising questions about whether he would relinquish that role.

The possibility that Min Aung Hlaing might not want to formally lead the new government was highlighted on Wednesday after he signed a law authorising the creation of a new Union Consultative Council, a body that could allow its chairman to wield influence without taking centre stage.

The law published in the state-run Myanma Alinn newspaper allows the new President to form the council with at least five members, including a chairman. It says the council could advise and coordinate on national security, international relations, peace processes and legislation, without affecting executive or judicial powers.

The move reflects the military's use of parallel bodies since the army seized power in 2021 from the elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, plunging the country into

The Union Solidarity and Development Party won Myanmar's first polls since the military coup in 2021. Myanmar has been embroiled in a civil for years —*UN*

widespread unrest and armed resistance that has since evolved into civil war.

It remains unclear whether Min Aung Hlaing will lead the council, which was announced to coincide with the release of final results from Myanmar's first election in five years.

Voting took place in three phases in December and January in 263 of the country's 330 townships, leaving about one-fifth without voting because of fighting.

According to final figures from the Union Election Commission, the USDP won 339 of the total 586 seats in the national parliament.

That means that along with the military, which is automatically allocated 166 seats under the constitution, the two hold 505, which is about 86 per cent of the legislature. Twenty-one other parties won between one and 20 seats each.

On Wednesday, Myanma Alinn's report cited Min Aung Hlaing, as saying at a meeting with senior military officers on Tuesday, that the USDP won with more than 44 per cent of nationwide vote. He added that more than 13 million voters — about 54 per cent of the more than 24 million eligible — cast ballots in the election, describing the turnout as enthusiastic participation of the public.

A separate report in Myanma Alinn said he told the visiting Russian Security Council Secretary Sergey Shoigu during a meeting in the capital Naypyitaw on Tuesday that Parliament will convene in the third week of March to elect a new president.

UN human rights chief Volker Türk said in a statement on Friday marking the anniversary of the military takeover that the election failed to respect fundamental rights, and that the process served only to exacerbate violence and societal polarization. He said voter coercion was reported nationwide, including fears of forced conscription, loss of food access and administrative penalties.

"For five years now, the military's rule has been characterised by repression of political dissent, mass arbitrary arrests, arbitrary conscription, widespread surveillance and limitation of civic space," Turk said. "Now, the military is seeking to entrench its rule-by-violence after forcing people to the ballot box. This couldn't be further from civilian rule." —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساڈہ

Arms race likely as Russia, US nuke pact likely to end

The last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the United States is set to expire on Thursday, removing any caps on the two largest atomic arsenals for the first time in more than a half-century.

The termination of the New START Treaty would set the stage for what many fear could be an unconstrained nuclear arms race.

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared readiness to stick to the treaty's limits for another year if Washington follows suit, but President Donald Trump has been noncommittal about extending it.

Trump has repeatedly indicated he would like to keep limits on nuclear weapons and involve China in arms control talks, a White House official said on Monday. Trump will make a decision on nuclear arms control "on his own timeline".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday it would be a "more dangerous" world without limits on US and Russian nuclear stockpiles.

Arms control advocates have long voiced concern about the expiration of New START, warning it could lead to a new Russia-US arms race, foment global instability and increase the risk of nuclear conflict.

Failure to agree on keeping the pact's limits will likely encourage a bigger deployment, said Daryl Kimball, Executive Director of the Arms Control Association in Washington.

"For the first time in about 35 years... (the two sides could) increase the number of nuclear weapons deployed on each side," Kimball said. "And this would open up the possibility of an unconstrained, dangerous three-way arms race, not just between the US and Russia, but also involving China, which is also increasing its smaller but still deadly nuclear arsenal."

Beijing has balked at any restrictions.

Kingston Reif of the RAND Corporation, a former US deputy assistant secretary of defence, also warned during an online discussion that "in the absence of the predictability of the treaty, each side could be incentivised to plan for the worst or to increase their deployed arsenals to show toughness and resolve, or to search for negotiating leverage".

Putin repeatedly has brandished Russia's nuclear might since sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022, warning Moscow was prepared to use "all means" to protect its security interests. In 2024, he signed a revised nuclear doctrine lowering the threshold for

FREEPIK

nuclear weapons use.

New START, signed in 2010 by former US president Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, restricted each side to no more than 1,550 nuclear warheads on no more than 700 missiles and bombers — deployed and ready for use. It was originally supposed to expire in 2021 but was extended for five more years. It followed a long succession of US-Russian nuclear arms reduction pacts.

The pact envisioned sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance, although they stopped in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic and never resumed.

In February 2023, Putin suspended Moscow's participation, saying Russia couldn't allow US inspections of its nuclear sites at a time when Washington and its NATO allies have openly declared Moscow's defeat in Ukraine as their goal.

At the same time, the Kremlin emphasised it wasn't withdrawing from the pact altogether, pledging to respect its caps on nuclear weapons.

In September 2025, Putin said the pact's expiration would be destabilising and could fuel nuclear proliferation.

Without agreements limiting nuclear arsenals, Russia "will promptly and firmly fend off any new threats to our security," said Medvedev, who had signed the New START treaty and is now deputy head of Putin's Security Council.

"If we are not heard, we act proportionately seeking to restore parity," he said in recent remarks.

Medvedev specifically mentioned Trump's proposed Golden Dome missile defence system among potentially destabilising moves.

The Kremlin has described Washington's efforts to build a missile shield as a major threat, arguing it would erode Russia's nuclear deterrent by giving the US the capability to shoot down its intercontinental ballistic missiles.

As a response to the US missile shield, Putin ordered the development of the Burevestnik nuclear-tipped and nuclear-powered cruise missile and the Poseidon nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered underwater drone. Russia said last year it successfully tested the Poseidon and the Burevestnik and was preparing their deployment.

Trump's October statement about US intentions to resume nuclear tests for the first time since 1992 also troubled the Kremlin, which last conducted a test in 1990 when the USSR still existed.

The world was heading toward accelerated strategic competition, he said, with more spending and increasingly unstable relations involving the US, Russia, and China on nuclear matters, noted Kimball. —*PTI*

Can US & Venezuela replace Russia for India's oil needs?

After months of pressure over India's purchases of discounted Russian and sanctioned Iranian crude, New Delhi appears to have bowed to US President Donald Trump's demand by agreeing to phase out Russian oil imports and shift toward buying more barrels from the United States — and potentially Venezuela.

Trump claimed on Monday on his Truth Social platform that Minister Narendra Modi planned to "stop buying Russian oil," which the US President said would help end the war in Ukraine.

Russia's energy revenues — which have financed the conflict — fell by a fifth last year, the UK's Financial Times daily reported last week, adding to the pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin to achieve a peace deal.

Trump said India could buy $500 billion worth of US energy and coal, along with technology, agricultural and other products.

Modi confirmed the tariff cut on X but made no mention of the oil deal. But the Reuters cited an unnamed Indian government official as saying that US petroleum supplies were among the goods included in the deal.

On Wednesday, Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said the country would diversify its energy sources, but did not mention shifting purchases from any particular country.

Trump had earlier framed the move as a part of a broader trade deal under which the US would slash its tariffs on Indian goods from 50 per cent to 18 per cent, while India would cut its tariffs on US products to zero. New Delhi has yet to confirm this.

The US tariff rate on India had been among the world's highest after Trump in August imposed an extra 25 per cent levy on Indian goods as punishment for India's oil purchases from Russia since Moscow's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The White House said the additional tariff would now be scrapped.

New Delhi has already begun cutting its reliance on Russian crude following US sanctions on oil firms Rosneft and Lukoil.

Last week, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri told Bloomberg that shipments had dropped by nearly a third to 1.3 million barrels per day (bpd) in recent weeks.

He said Indian oil firms were keen to increase imports from Canada and the US as part of a strategy to diversify supplies across more than 40 countries.

However, Harsh Pant, a foreign policy expert at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, was cited by the Financial Times as saying that an immediate shift from Russian oil was "unlikely to happen."

India's oil refineries are made for Russia's harsh oil, meaning it could take months for them to be rejigged to be able to process America's smoother oil —*FREEPIK*

HOW QUICKLY CAN RUSSIAN OIL BE REPLACED BY US?

Fully replacing Russian oil imports with US crude is likely to take several months to years, as Russian supplies make up around a quarter of the roughly 5 million bpd India imports.

According to estimates from energy-tracking firm Kpler published last year, a complete pivot would raise India's oil import bill by $9 to $11 billion annually, as Russian oil imports are heavily discounted, while US crude is more expensive.

The tariff and sanctions threat has already spurred India to step up its purchases of US oil. The Times of India reported last month that US crude imports rose 92 per cent from April to November last year.

Of the 178.1 million tons of oil India imported, 13 million tons came from US sources, compared to 7.1 million in the same period in 2024.

As the world's largest oil producer, the US has plenty to supply. But moving large volumes of US crude to India won't be straightforward.

The voyage takes more than six weeks, ties up tankers on one of the world's longest oil routes and depends on a US Gulf Coast export system that is already running near capacity.

Trump's other second-term energy deal could also mean India competing with the European Union for US supplies. As part of its tariff deal with Trump, the EU agreed in July to spend $750 billion through 2028 on procuring US oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and nuclear energy products.

Indian refineries are optimised for heavier, sour Russian Urals crude, which is turned into diesel and jet fuel to match domestic demand. Switching to lighter, sweeter US crudes would require operational tweaks that could take months.

CAN VENEZUELA RAMP UP SUPPLIES?

Trump's mention of Venezuela could see India potentially help to revive the Latin American nation's oil sector, which the US has effectively taken control of following the capture of longtime leader Nicolas Maduro last month.

Venezuela's interim government has already cut a deal with Washington to sell up to 50 million barrels of crude to US refiners and is reforming energy laws to attract foreign investment.

India was a major buyer of Venezuelan crude oil until March last year, when Trump levied a 25 per cent tariff on nations conducting oil trade with Caracas.

Venezuela mostly pumps heavy, sulphur rich crude — the kind of dense, tar like oil that India's refineries are set up to run efficiently. But deliveries could be impacted by lingering sanctions as well as similar logistical hurdles and increased costs from moving oil from the other side of the world.

With Venezuela's oil output still hovering around 900,000 bpd — a fraction of the 3 to 4 million barrels it produced in the early 2000s — it will take years, stable politics and huge investments to ramp up supplies to satisfy India's demand. Another issue is price, as Venezuela sold its oil to Asian refineries at a steep discount due to US sanctions.

—*DW News*

PRAJAVANI

UN Security Council condemns deadly Pakistan attacks

ISLAMABAD, 4 FEB

The UN Security Council has strongly condemned a recent surge in militant attacks in Pakistan's south-western Balochistan province that has killed dozens of people, most of them were civilians. The violence began on Saturday with coordinated attacks targeting civilians and buildings used by police and security forces, killing at least 36 civilians and 17 security personnel. Pakistani security forces have intensified operations in the insurgency-hit region, claiming to have killed 197 militants belonging to the banned Baloch Liberation Army, which has claimed responsibility for the attacks. In a statement, Council President James Kariuki denounced the "heinous and cowardly" attacks and offered condolences to the families of the victims. —*PTI*

Jill Biden's first husband charged for murder

WILMINGTON, 4 FEB

The former first husband of ex-US First Lady Jill Biden has been charged with murdering his wife at their home in Delaware, authorities said on Tuesday. William Stevenson, 77, of Wilmington, who was married to Jill Biden from 1970 to 1975, is accused of killing his wife, Linda Stevenson, 64, on 28 December. The Delaware Attorney General's office confirmed his past marriage to Jill Biden, who declined to comment. Police were called to the house after 11pm following reports of a domestic dispute and found Linda Stevenson unresponsive in the living room. Life-saving efforts failed. Stevenson was arrested after a weeks-long investigation and charged with first-degree murder. He remains in custody after failing to post USD 500,000 bail. —*PTI*

Ethiopia PM accuses Eritrea of Tigray massacres

ADDIS, 4 FEB

Ethiopia has for the first time acknowledged that Eritrean troops took part in the war in its northern Tigray region, accusing them of mass killings during the conflict that ended in 2022. PM Abiy Ahmed told parliament on Tuesday that Eritrean forces, who fought alongside Ethiopian troops, carried out atrocities in towns including Axum and Adwa. The war is estimated to have killed more than 400,000 people. Eritrea dismissed the claims, calling them "cheap and despicable lies". Relations between the neighbours have sharply deteriorated, with both sides accusing each other of preparing for war. Tensions are also linked to Ethiopia's long-standing demand for access to the Red Sea, lost after Eritrea's independence in 1993. —*PTI*

15 migrants die as boat hits Greek Coast Guard ship

ATHENS, 4 FEB

Greek coastguard teams continued searching off the eastern Aegean island of Chios on Wednesday after a patrol vessel collided with a speedboat carrying migrants, killing at least 15 people. The crash happened late on Tuesday night. Authorities said 11 men and four women died, while at least 24 migrants, including around 11 children, were injured and taken to hospital. Two coastguard officers were also hurt, with one remaining hospitalised. The total number of people on the speedboat was not immediately clear. The coastguard said the boat was travelling without navigation lights and failed to stop despite warnings, before changing course and colliding with the patrol vessel and capsizing. The account could not be independently verified. —*PTI*

Amid ICE row, Don signs bill to end govt shutdown

Bipartisan $1.2T funding bill passed in narrow 217–214 vote

WASHINGTON, 4 FEB

President Donald Trump has signed a USD 1.2 trillion government funding bill, ending the partial government shutdown that started on Saturday.

Congress now faces difficult negotiations over US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), after lawmakers approved a funding package that extends funding until 13 February.

Democrats demand for tighter immigration enforcement following the fatal shootings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis.

Speaker Mike Johnson needed near-unanimous support from his Republican conference to proceed to a final vote.

The House approved it with a 217-214 vote. US President Donald Trump moved quickly to sign the bill after.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries quickly warned Democrats would not support any further temporary funding for Homeland Security without substantial changes to its immigration operations, raising the potential of another shutdown for the department.

President Donald Trump speaks at White House on Tuesday, before signing a spending bill that will end a partial government —*PTI*

FED GOV RESIGNS FROM WHITE HOUSE

Federal Reserve Governor Stephen Miran has stepped down as head of the White House's Council of Economic Advisers after facing scrutiny for holding both roles simultaneously. It is rare for a Fed governor to retain a White House post, as past appointees have typically resigned before joining the central bank. Miran had instead taken unpaid leave.

The short-term measure reflects Democratic demands for tighter restrictions on immigration enforcement following the fatal shootings of US citizens- Pretti and Good by ICE Minneapolis.

Democrats were able to fend off some of Trump's most draconian proposed cuts while adding language that helps ensure funds are spent as stipulated by Congress

Republicans avoided a massive, catchall funding bill known as an omnibus as part of this year's appropriations process.

Such bills, often taken up before the holiday season with lawmakers anxious to return home, have contributed to greater federal spending, they say. —*PTI*

Don, Colombia's Petro signal thaw in ties

President Donald Trump met for nearly two hours on Tuesday with Colombian President Gustavo Petro at the White House. This signals an apparent thaw after months of tensions. The leaders discussed counter-narcotics cooperation and other issues, and Trump later described the meeting as being "very good," despite previously criticising the Colombian President and threatening military action over drug trafficking allegations.

BNP to pursue 'Bangladesh First' policy: Tarique

DHAKA, 4 FEB

- If elected to power, "we will prioritise an economy-based foreign policy that safeguards Bangladesh's interests… No matter which countries we engage with"

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) would pursue an "economy-based foreign policy" if elected to power in the upcoming 12 February general election, the party's new Chairman Tarique Rahman has said.

"Our foreign policy will be a 'Bangladesh First' policy," he said in an interview with the US-based The Diplomat magazine, state-run BSS news agency on Wednesday said.

He added that if elected to power, "we will prioritise an economy-based foreign policy that safeguards Bangladesh's interests… No matter which countries we engage with, our national interest must come first."

The outlet had noted that there was criticism of an "India-oriented foreign policy" during deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime, with US and China also eyeing the region.

Rahman said his party was engaging with the thinking of Gen Z while "we are prioritising job creation, technical education, sports, the IT sector and job market, which I believe resonates strongly with Gen Z".

"If you look at today's atmosphere, you'll notice that most of the attendees in meetings were Gen Z," he said.

The article was titled 'An Interview With Tarique Rahman – Likely Bangladesh's Next Prime Minister,' a reference to the Rahman leading several opinion polls.

Rahman, 60, is the son of late prime minister Khaleda Zia. He had lived in self-exiled life in London for 17 years before returning when his mother passed away in December.

His main rival for the polls is likely the BNP's once crucial ally Jamaat-e-Islami, with the Awami League banned by the interim government. —*PTI*

Bibi says don't trust Tehran as US shoots down Iranian drone

DUBAI, 4 FEB

A US Navy fighter jet shot down an Iranian drone that was approaching an American aircraft carrier on Tuesday morning, its military said. The Iranian Mission to the UN did not immediately comment on the incident.

US Central Command said the drone "aggressively approached" the aircraft carrier, with "unclear intent" and it "continued to fly toward the ship despite deescalatory measures taken by US forces operating in international waters." The Shahed-139 drone was shot down by an F-35C fighter jet from the carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, which was sailing about 805 km from Iran's southern coast.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said that special envoy Steve Witkoff talks with Iranian officials are still scheduled despite the drone incident.

Iran has requested that the talks, initially scheduled to take place in Turkey, be shifted to Oman. The negotiations are likely to focus on Iran's nuclear enrichment.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met Witkoff in Jerusalem and told him to be sceptical of Iran's promises. Netanyahu "made clear his position that Iran has repeatedly proven that its promises cannot be trusted," a statement from his office said. —*AGENCIES*

Israel retaliatory fire kills 19 in Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH, 4 FEB

Israeli strikes in Gaza killed at least 19 Palestinians, most of them women and children, by midday Wednesday, according to hospital officials. Israel pledged to continue strikes, saying that it was responding to a militant attack on Israeli soldiers that seriously wounded one.

They are the latest Palestinians in Gaza to die since a ceasefire deal, which has been punctuated by deadly Israeli strikes, came into effect on 10 October 2025. More than 530 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli in that time, according to Gaza's health ministry.

The rising toll has shaken the US-backed truce, with Hamas calling the attacks violations of the deal and Israel saying its forces are responding to militant attacks.

Israel clears Haredi Jews' entry into IDF

Israel Defence Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Lt Gen Eyal Zamir on Tuesday signed a landmark order formalising the integration of Orthodox (Haredi) Jews into military service, as the army grapples with manpower shortages. The directive, developed over 18 months, establishes three service tracks offering varying levels of religious accommodation and gender separation. —*PTI*

UK TO RELEASE FILES ON MANDELSON'S EPSTEIN TIES

LONDON, 4 FEB

The British government has agreed to release emails and other documents casting light on the decision to appoint Peter Mandelson as ambassador to the United States despite his friendship with late pedophile and sex-trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

The decision follows the opposition Conservative Party's move to force a parliamentary vote on Wednesday, calling for the release of emails and messages related to his 2024 appointment as British ambassador.

Critics say he should never have been given the role, as his relationship with Epstein was known at the time, even if its full extent was not.

In 2009, he appears to have shared an internal report on a potential sale of UK government assets with Epstein. Newly released files also suggest that in 2003, Epstein sent payments totalling USD 75,000 to accounts linked to Mandelson.

Following the newly released filed Mendelson reigned form the Labour Party.

The government has agreed to release the requested information unless it is "prejudicial to UK national security or international relations." It is unclear how much material will be released or when.

Epstein died by suicide in a New York jail in 2019 while awaiting trial.

MELINDA GATES 'PAINFUL MEMORIES'

Melinda Gates said recent Epstein document disclosures mentioning her former husband, Bill Gates, reopened "very painful" memories from their marriage. Bill denied wrongdoing, calling the claims "absurd." —*AGENCIES*

The US delegation includes special envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner —*x*

Russia, Ukraine envoys meet in Abu Dhabi for US-brokered talks

KYIV, 4 FEB

Envoys from Russia and Ukraine met in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday for another round of US-brokered talks aimed at ending the nearly four-year war, even as fighting on the ground and wider geopolitical manoeuvring continued.

Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council chief Rustem Umerov said delegations from Kyiv, Moscow and Washington opened the planned two-day negotiations together before splitting into topic-based working groups, to reconvene later.

The US delegation includes special envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, according to the White House.

The talks coincide with the expiry on Thursday of the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between Russia and the United States, raising the prospect of an extension or renegotiation to prevent a fresh arms race.

The meeting comes amid Ukrainian anger over renewed Russian attacks on their energy infrastructure and repeated strikes on civilians during one of the coldest winters in years.

Ukraine says Moscow resumed strikes despite assurances of a temporary pause.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said "the doors for a peaceful settlement are open", while separately President Vladimir Putin highlighted Russia's deepening economic cooperation with China, underscoring Moscow's parallel diplomatic tracks. —*PTI*

INDIAN JAILED FOR GROPING ON US FLIGHT

NEW YORK, 4 FEB

An Indian national has been convicted of sexual contact and assault aboard a domestic flight in the US.

Varun Arora, 38, who is in the country without lawful immigration status, faces up to two years in prison when he is sentenced in May.

According to court records, the incident occurred in August 2024, during the final approach of a flight from Rhode Island to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. A female passenger woke to find Arora sexually groping her. Despite wearing a sleep mask and pretending to be asleep, he continued to place his hand on the victim even after she repeatedly pushed it away. A federal district judge will decide the sentence after considering US sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors.

SHOT TO DEATH

Late dictator Gadhafi's son killed in Libya

Seif al-Islam Gadhafi —*x*

CAIRO, 4 FEB

- Seif al-Islam was captured in Zintan in 2011 while fleeing to Niger and released in 2017 under an amnesty, after which he lived in Zintan.

Seif al-Islam Gadhafi, the son and one-time heir apparent of Libya's late dictator Moammar Gadhafi, was killed in the northern African country, Libyan officials said on Tuesday.

The 53 year old was killed in the town Zintan, about 136 kilometers southwest of from the capital.

The office said in a statement that an initial investigation found that Seif al-Islam was shot to death, but did not provide further details about the circumstances of his killing.

Khaled al-Zaidi, a lawyer for Seif al-Islam, also confirmed his death on Facebook, without providing details.

Seif al-Islam's political team said four masked men stormed his home and killed him in what it described as a "cowardly and treacherous assassination," adding that he resisted the attackers, who disabled the house's CCTV cameras.

Seif al-Islam was captured by fighters in Zintan late in 2011 while attempting to flee to neighboring Niger.

The fighters released him in June 2017 after one of Libya's rival governments granted him amnesty. He had since lived in Zintan.

A Libyan court convicted him of inciting violence and murdering protesters and sentenced him to death in absentia in 2015.

He was also wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity related to the 2011 uprising.

In November 2021, Seif al-Islam announced his candidacy in the country's presidential election in a controversial move that was met with outcry from anti-Gadhafi political forces in western and eastern Libya.

The country's High National Elections Committee disqualified him, but the election wasn't held over disputes between rival administrations and armed groups that have ruled Libya since the ouster of Moammar Gadhafi. —*PTI*

Spain to ban social media for teens under 16 years

MADRID/PARIS, 4 FEB

Spain plans to ban social media access for children under 16, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said in a move designed to shield them from the harms of online content.

Sánchez comments came in a speech at a Dubai summit. He chided the world's biggest tech companies, saying they allow illegal content such as child sex abuse and sexualised deepfake images to proliferate on their platforms.

"Today, our children are exposed to a space they were never meant to navigate alone," Sánchez said. 'We will no longer accept that."

Spain joins a growing number of countries, including Australia and France, which have taken or are considering measures to restrict minors' access to social media.

In January, France approved a bill banning social media for children under 15, paving the way for the measure to take effect at the start of the next school year in September.

In Paris, French prosecutors raided the offices of social media platform X on Tuesday as part of a preliminary investigation into allegations that include spreading child sexual abuse images and deepfakes. They have also summoned billionaire owner Elon Musk for questioning.

In a post on Musk-owned social media site X, the platform condemned the raid on its Paris office as "an abusive law enforcement theatre" aimed at illegitimate political ends. —*PTI*

Silver nears Rs 3L/kg; gold hits Rs 1.65L/10g

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Precious metals extended their sharp rally for the second straight day in the national capital on Wednesday, with silver prices surging to Rs 2.98 lakh per kg and gold climbing to Rs 1.65 lakh per 10g. According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver soared by Rs 14,300, or 5.03 per cent, to Rs 2,98,300 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also advanced sharply, gaining Rs 7,400, or 4.69 per cent, to Rs 1,65,100 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes. In the international market, spot silver gained USD 4.28, or 5.03 per cent, to USD 89.35 per ounce, while gold rose by USD 100.03, or 2.02 per cent, to USD 5,047.07 per ounce —*PTI*

Rupee falls 11P, closes at 90.43 against USD

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

The rupee depreciated 11 paise to 90.43 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, after a sharp rally in the previous trading session following India-US trade deal announcement, on suspected dollar buying by corporates and importers. Forex traders said despite the positive sentiment after the India-US trade deal, caution still remains as there is no signed or officially released trade agreement yet -- no framework text or final documentation. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.35 and touched an early high of 90.26 and a low of 90.54 against the greenback. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.03 per cent lower at 97.40. —*PTI*

E2Wheelers volume to grow 16-18%: Crisil

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

The easing of rare-earth supply is expected to drive electric two-wheeler volume growth in India to 16-18 per cent next fiscal after moderating to 12-13 per cent in the ongoing fiscal due to supply chain constraints, according to Crisil Ratings. This fiscal, the growth of the electric two-wheeler (E2W) is expected to be moderate due to temporary disruptions in the supply of rare-earth magnets and the rationalisation of the goods and services tax (GST) on internal combustion engine (ICE) models, Crisil Ratings said in a statement. "As availability of rare earth magnets began to ease OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) relied on discounting and introduced electric models at much lower prices to narrow the ICE-EV price gap," Crisil Ratings Senior Director Anuj Sethi said. This move will also increase demand.—*PTI*

Sun Pharma partners with RCB as prime sponsor

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries on Wednesday said it has partnered with Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) as principal sponsor and health partner for a three-year period starting with the 2026 season. The partnership marks the Mumbai-based drug major's first-ever foray into cricket sponsorship, signalling a significant milestone in its corporate brand journey, the company said in a statement. "RCB and Sun Pharma are both leaders in their respective domains, and this collaboration reflects our shared values of consistency, passion and innovation," Sun Pharma Managing Director Kirti Ganorkar said. Through this partnership, Sun Pharma aims to strengthen its corporate brand connect with people across India by bringing them closer to the company they rely on every day medicines, he added.—*PTI*

India Services PMI hits 2-month high at 58.5 in Jan

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

India's services purchasing managers' index (PMI) rose to a two-month high of 58.5, while the composite PMI, which combines manufacturing and services, increased to 58.4, as per HSBC data.

The HSBC India Services PMI® Business Activity Index, which is based on a single question assessing changes in business activity compared to the previous month, rose to 58.5 in January from December's recent low of 58.0.

January data showed the domestic market remained the main source of new business gains, although international orders also rose at a solid pace.

Service providers across the country reported a recovery in growth during January, supported by quicker expansions in new business intakes and output. Firms were also more optimistic about the outlook and increased hiring during the month.

Input costs and selling charges rose at a quicker, though still moderate, pace.

Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index climbed from December's 57.8 to 58.4 in January. The reading signalled a sharp rate of expansion, supported by stronger growth in both manufacturing and services. Improved demand conditions across the two sectors also lifted overall sales.

Segment-wise data showed that Finance and Insurance topped the growth rankings for both output and new orders.

Services firms reported higher prices for items such as eggs, electronic goods, meat, paper, parts and vegetables.

The data also indicated broadly stable levels of outstanding business across the services sector. The seasonally adjusted index for pending workloads stood only marginally above the neutral 50.0 mark in January. —*ANI*

IT stocks nosedive 6% as Anthropic unveils new AI tool

Sensex up by 78.65 pts, while Nifty rose by 48.45 pts

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed slightly higher a day after the US- India trade deal as the markets turned cautions as IT stocks saw a downfall of by 6.3 per cent on Wednesday after AI startup Anthropic launched its new AI tool, sources said.

After swinging between gains and losses throughout the session, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 78.56 points or 0.09 per cent higher at 83,817.69. During the day, it touched a high of 83,947.53 and a low of 83,119.95, gyrating about 827.58 points.

A total of 2,726 stocks advanced, while 1,477 declined and 163 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 48.45 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 25,776.

From the Sensex firms, Eternal, Trent, NTPC, Adani Ports, Power Grid, Maruti, Reliance Industries and ICICI Bank were the biggest gainers.

However, IT stocks tumbled sharply, erasing Rs 1.66 lakh crore in combined market valuation. Infosys fell 7.19 per cent, Tata Consultancy Services dropped 6.95 per cent, LTIMindtree lost 5.51 per cent, Hexaware Technologies fell 4.98 per cent, Persistent Systems declined 4.69 per cent, HCL Technologies shed 4.22 per cent, Tech Mahindra lost 4.12 per cent, and Wipro slipped 3.73 per cent. The BSE IT index plunged 5.49 per cent to 35,109.51.

"Domestic equities witnessed a volatile session, swinging between gains and losses as rising US-Iran tensions kept investors on edge.

Mid-cap and small-cap stocks outperformed large caps as value buying emerged following a recent correction...market sentiment will largely be guided by the upcoming policy decision of the RBI and greater clarity that will emerge on the newly announced trade agreement between India and US," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited said. —*PTI*

What is the new Anthropic tool?

Anthropic's Claude Cowork AI assistant has sent shockwaves through markets, wiping $285 billion from software, legal tech, and financial services stocks. Launched in January, Claude Cowork is an agentic AI tool for non-technical professionals that can read files, organise folders, draft documents, and complete multi-step tasks with user consent. Last Friday, Anthropic released 11 open-source plugins enabling customised workflows across productivity, finance, marketing, sales, customer support, and legal tasks. The legal plugin—automating contract review, NDA triage, compliance checks, and briefings—triggered the sell-off. —*Agencies*

RS 40,000 CR FRAUD

SC irked over delay in CBI, ED probe against Anil Ambani

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the CBI and the ED to conduct a "fair", "prompt" and "dispassionate probe into alleged massive banking and corporate fraud to the tune of Rs 40,000 crore involving Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (ADAG), Anil Ambani and group companies.

Anil Ambani, represented by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, assured the top court that he will not leave the country without its prior nod when PIL petitioner and former bureaucrat EAS Sarma apprehended that he may flee.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi sought fresh status reports in four weeks from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on the progress made in the ongoing investigation against Ambani and ADAG firms.

"Both ED and CBI have already taken time, and we therefore expect that both agencies will act promptly," the bench said and asked the ED to constitute a SIT comprising senior officers to take the probe against ADAG and others to a logical conclusion promptly.

The bench took note of the appearances made by Anil Ambani and ADAG through senior lawyers Rohatgi and Shyam Divan and granted them four weeks' time to file responses to the PIL.

The bench criticised the CBI's procedural approach, noting that the agency had registered only one FIR in 2025 based on a complaint from the State Bank of India (SBI), despite receiving subsequent complaints from various other financial institutions. —*PTI*

'India can achieve double-digit growth'

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani on Wednesday said sustained double-digit growth for India is achievable, asserting that stable economic leadership and long-term social harmony define successful nations.

Speaking at a JioBlackRock event, Ambani said India could maintain strong expansion if law and order and social cohesion are sustained for 15–20 years.

He highlighted India's digital progress, saying, "Every Indian village has a 5G network that is better and cheaper than any other country." Ambani also said he could "clearly see 100 new Reliances" emerging across the country.

Echoing the optimism, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink said the next 20–25 years would be "the era of India", with the economy expected to grow at 8–10 per cent over the next decade and beyond. Speaking during a fireside chat with Ambani, Fink said India was the country he most wanted to invest in.

Fink said India has less need to import capital, stressing the importance of domestic savings. —*PTI*

Less than half of listed IPOs trading below price: Report

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

Less than half of the IPO's listed during the last six years are trading below their issue price, and nearly 19 per cent of them are at a loss of 25-50 per cent from their IPO price, suggests data shared in a report by Axis Capital.

The report data showed that around 180 out of 374 companies listed in the last 6 years are currently trading below their issue price.

Among these, nearly 19 per cent of all listed companies, or 70 firms, are trading at a loss of 25 to 50 per cent compared to their issue price. In addition, 34 companies, or 9 per cent, have witnessed even steeper declines and are trading more than 50 per cent lower than their issue price.

50 companies, or 13 per cent, are currently trading at losses ranging between 10 and 25 per cent, the report said. —*ANI*

TAX HOLIDAY

No tax risk for foreign cos setting up data centres: Fin Min

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

The Budget proposal of a 20-year tax holiday to foreign companies which provide cloud services globally will be available only to those which have set up a MeitY-notified data centre in India, and there will not be any risk for such overseas firms of their global income being taxed in India on this account.

Stating this, Finance Ministry sources said on Wednesday that the Budget announcement would also give certainty to foreign companies that are in the business of providing cloud services and procurement services from a data centre in India.

"Now Indian data centres can confidently offer their services to such global cloud entities, without these global entities perceiving any tax risk if they use Indian data centres," sources added.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her 2026-27 Budget, had proposed to provide a tax holiday till 2047 to any foreign company that provides cloud services to customers globally by using data centre services from India. It will, however, need to provide services to Indian customers through an Indian reseller entity.

The treatment of foreign cloud services entities is the same whether the data centre is Indian owned or a subsidiary of the global entity. So, there is a complete level-playing field, sources added. —*PTI*

IndiGo to adjust int'l flight operations

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

IndiGo will adjust its long-haul flights operated with leased Dreamliners, including suspending services to Copenhagen from 17 February, as the airline seeks to tackle external operational constraints.

As part of the adjustments necessitated by Iranian airspace uncertainties and congestion at airports, the carrier on Wednesday said it will also reduce flights on Delhi–London Heathrow and Delhi–Manchester routes.

The airline said its wide-body operation faced external operational constraints such as continuously changing airspace constraints due to geo-political conditions. —*PTI*

Domestic air traffic rises to 16.69 cr; Indigo shares dip

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Domestic air traffic rose over 3 per cent to 16.69 crore in 2025, while the number of people who flew in domestic airlines fell to 1.43 crore in December.

Data released by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) showed that IndiGo, which had cancelled a large number of flights in early December, saw its market share slump to 59.6 per cent in that month from 63.6 per cent. The market share of Air India Group and Akasa Air rose to 29.6 per cent and 5.2 per cent, respectively.

SpiceJet's market share rise to 4.3 per cent in December.

According to the data, state-owned Alliance Air's market share remained unchanged at 0.4 per cent in December.

The overall cancellation of scheduled domestic airlines was 6.92 per cent in December.

Over 10.46 lakh passengers were affected by flight cancellations in December, and airlines shelled out over Rs 24 crore towards compensation and facilitation.

In December 2025, a total of 29,212 passenger-related complaints were received by the scheduled domestic airlines, DGCA said. —*PTI*

AFTER RAIDS ON 'X'

Paris prosecutors summon Elon Musk

PARIS, 4 FEB

French prosecutors raided the offices of social media platform X on Tuesday as part of a preliminary investigation into allegations that include spreading child sexual abuse images and deepfakes. They have also summoned billionaire owner Elon Musk for questioning.

X and Musk's artificial intelligence company xAI also face intensifying scrutiny from Britain's data privacy regulator, which opened formal investigations into how they handled personal data when they developed and deployed Musk's artificial intelligence chatbot Grok.

Grok, which was built by xAI and is available through X, sparked global outrage last month after it pumped out a torrent of sexualised nonconsensual deepfake images in response to requests from X users.

The French investigation was opened in January last year by the prosecutors' cybercrime unit, the Paris prosecutors' office said in a statement. It is looking into alleged "complicity" in possessing and spreading pornographic images of minors, sexually explicit deepfakes, denial of crimes against humanity and manipulation of an automated data processing system as part of an organised group, among other charges.

Prosecutors asked Musk and former CEO Linda Yaccarino to attend "voluntary interviews" on 20 April. Employees of X were summoned to be heard as witnesses. French authorities opened their investigation b a French lawmaker alleging that biased algorithms on X likely distorted the functioning of an automated data processing system. —*PTI*

Sebi mulls easing 'fit, proper' norms for market

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) on Wednesday proposed a comprehensive overhaul of the 'fit and proper person' framework governing market intermediaries for greater procedural clarity.

Sebi suggested amendments to Schedule II of the Intermediaries Regulations, 2008, which deal with the 'Fit and Proper Person' criteria applicable to intermediaries, their key management personnel and persons in control.

It has proposed to clearly codify the right to a hearing, refine the scope of disqualifying events, and reduce regulatory uncertainty for applicants and intermediaries.

The regulator has recommended to abolish the reference to initiation of winding-up proceedings as a disqualification in a bid to ensure that only a final winding-up order is considered while assessing whether a person is fit and proper.

A new clause was proposed, requiring intermediaries or applicants to inform Sebi within seven days if any disqualifying event occurs and clarify that person can be declared 'not fit and proper' only after being given a reasonable opportunity of being heard.

Such persons should only be restricted from exerciusing their right to voting, while retaining their economic ownership. —*PTI*

-PTI

Sachin's winning wisdom for Mumbai's cricketers

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

The legendary Sachin Tendulkar on Wednesday shared his ideas on handling pressure and maintaining a winning mindset with the Mumbai players ahead of their Ranji Trophy quarterfinal against Karnataka. The 42-time winners Mumbai will take on the eight-time champions Karnataka in the quarterfinal of the 2025-26 season here at the MCA-BKC Ground from February 6-10. The former Mumbai captain Tendulkar, fielded questions from both the players as well as the coaching staff during their meeting at the BKC facility. "We were lucky to be graced by Sachin sir's presence in the dressing room today (Wednesday). Rather than just a pep talk from him, it was more of a Q&A session," Mumbai captain Shardul Thakur said in a statement.—*PTI*

-PTI

BOXAM Elite: Hitesh, Preeti power India to flying start

DUBAI, 4 FEB

India emphatically opened its campaign at the BOXAM Elite International, delivering a string of dominant performances on day one of the prestigious tournament that has drawn 214 boxers from 21 nations. World Boxing Cup Finals champion Hitesh Gulia (70kg), headlining the Indian men's charge, was in complete control, dispatching the Netherlands' Finn Bos with a comprehensive 5:0 verdict. Calm, measured, and incisive, the Indian showcased his trademark ring intelligence and timing to dictate proceedings from start to finish. Earlier, Preeti set the tone in the elite women's 54kg division with a clinical 5:0 win over Kazakhstan's Aliaskar Symbat, combining sharp combinations with disciplined defence to shut out her opponent.—*PTI*

Dope test: Passler suspended ahead of Winter Olympics

ROME, 4 FEB

Italian biathlete Rebecca Passler tested positive for doping and was provisionally suspended Monday from competing in her hometown at the Milan Cortina Olympics.Italy's anti-doping agency said Passler tested positive for letrozole in an out-of-competition sample ahead of the Olympics that open Friday. The sample was taken outside the official Games-time testing program. Letrozole can be used in the treatment of breast cancer and also control the effects of steroid use.—*PTI*

Shooting League of India postponed again

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

The inaugural edition of the Shooting League of India (SLI) was postponed once again, the National Rifle Association of India announced on Wednesday. Initially supposed to have commenced last year, the league was first postponed to February 2026. Although there are no revised dates, the NRAI has now said that the event will get underway "later this year." "This move is designed to strengthen the league's long-term positioning, broadcast impact, and overall fan experience. It will also position the league as the ultimate celebration of Indian shooting.—*PTI*

Asian C'ship: Esha helps India win two gold, Samrat bronze

Olympian Esha Singh -PTI

NEW DELHI, 4 FEB

Olympian Esha Singh carried her excellent form from last year into the new season, clinching the women's individual 10m air pistol gold and helping the home team to another top-podium finish, even as world champion Samrat Rana settled for bronze on the opening day of the Asian Championship (pistol/rifle) here on Wednesday.

Esha, 21, came from behind to score 239.8 in the final, fending off challenges from two Chinese Taipei shooters -- Cheng Yen-Ching (235.4, silver) and Yu Ai-Wen (217.7, bronze) -- as well as compatriot Suruchi Singh, to claim her second individual senior Asian Championship gold.

The shooter, who had earlier secured the season-ending ISSF World Cup gold in Ningbo, China, last year, had won her first continental title in Jakarta in 2024 at the age of 19.Suruchi, 19, who led the final after the first 10-shot stage, slipped dramatically in the elimination round to finish fourth, while Manu Bhaker, a double bronze medallist at the Paris Olympics and the third Indian to reach the eight-shooter final, ended up in seventh place.

In a competition that didn't rise to great levels, with all the shooters' scores swaying between the highs of upper 10s and the lows of 8s, it was Esha who kept her cool with three scores of 10.4 and above to take a big leap for gold, while the two Chinese Taipei shooters fell back sharply, with some of their scores in the 9s and 8s. In the qualification round, Suruchi finished second with a score of 576, while Manu and Esha both ended on 575. Manu edged ahead of Esha for qualification based on a higher 'inner 10' count, with all three advancing to the final. —*PTI*

RCB eye second crown, DC aim to break jinx

RCB have enjoyed a dream run this season

VADODARA, 4 FEB

-PTI

Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Smriti Mandhana will have the opportunity to lead her side to parity with the Mumbai Indians in terms of success in the Women's Premier League, while the Delhi Capitals will look to break their final jinx when the tournament's two most entertaining sides take on each other in the summit clash here on Thursday.

Former champions RCB have enjoyed a dream run this season, repeatedly showing the ability to step up and bounce back when the chips are down.

That resilience helped them create history by beginning their campaign with five consecutive wins, becoming the first WPL team to do so.

Adding to that, one or two players from within the group have consistently taken their game to the next level when required, a pattern that has emerged with monotonous regularity this season.

If Australian stalwart Grace Harris' blazing 75 against UP Warriorz in the previous match after a topsy-turvy season set the tone for an emphatic eight-wicket win, then little-known Gautami Naik's 73 against Gujarat Giants proved pivotal in a commanding 61-run victory for the 2024 champions, who will be aiming for a second title to draw level with Mumbai Indians.

Although RCB batters including Mandhana, Harris, Georgia Voll, and Richa Ghosh have lacked consistency this season, isolated but timely contributions have proved decisive. Pace bowlers Nadine de Klerk and Sayali Satghare have delivered when it has mattered most.

South African Nadine de Klerk is currently the third-highest wicket-taker this season with 15 scalps from eight matches, including a best of 4 for 22, making her a potential game-changer in the final. —*PTI*

Captaincy made me think less about myself: Jemimah Rodrigues

In the last 3-4 months, I think I've grown the most. Especially in the last month as a captain. The best part about captaincy is that I have thought less about myself and more about the team. And that took a lot of pressure off me. So that just gave me that space where I don't overthink my game, Jemimah told the media. On the eve of the 2026 Women's Premier League final, the two Indian stars sat next to each other as captains of Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Delhi Capitals, respectively. The glittering trophy, which is at stake on Thursday, was placed right in the middle. The glittering trophy, which is at stake on Thursday, was placed right in the middle.

SAFF U-19 WOMEN'S C'SHIP

India beats Bhutan 8-0 in finals

NEPAL, 4 FEB

India thrashed Bhutan 8-0 to move a step closer to the final of the Under-19 SAFF Women's Championship at the Pokhara Rangasala in Nepal on Wednesday.

The Young Tigresses have, with this result, secured a spot in the final after Bangladesh defeated host Nepal 4-0 in the second match on Wednesday.

Needing at least a draw to stay in the title race, India began aggressively and took the lead in the sixth minute through Alisha Lyngdoh. Abhista Basnett doubled the advantage four minutes later, triggering a flood of goals. Pearl Fernandes struck a hat-trick, while Divyani Linda and Pritika Barman also found the net as India ran riot.

By half-time, the contest was effectively over, with India racing to a 7-0 lead. Barman added her second and India's eighth goal a minute from time to cap a dominant performance.

After the win, India finished second on the table with six points from three matches, three behind leader Bangladesh. The host finished third with three points, while Bhutan is rock-bottom with none.

A minute later, Divyani made it four when she surged forward from the right and slotted it in at the near post.

Pritika scored the fifth in the 25th minute when she entered the Nepal box from the right and netted at the far post. In the 38th minute, Pritika turned provider, supplying a low cross to Pearl, who scored into a gaping net.

A couple of minutes later, Pearl completed her hat-trick, tapping the ball in from close range after a set-piece caused some confusion in the Bhutan box.

Pritika was named the Player of the Match. —*PTI*

Bengaluru's altitude challenge: Navigating tennis at new heights

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

Yuki Bhambri -PTI

When India and the Netherlands walk out for their Davis Cup tie in Bengaluru this weekend, they won't just be competing against each other but also negotiating one of tennis's most demanding variables: altitude.

At 900 metres (2,950 feet) above sea level, Bengaluru stands as India's highest-altitude tennis venue, well above Pune (550m). While it may not be as extreme as venues like Quito (2850m) or La Paz (3500m), the thinner air is still significant enough to materially alter how the ball travels, how the body responds, and how players must construct points.

In team competitions like the Davis Cup, where margins are thin and preparation is decisive, altitude can quietly become the tie-breaker.At higher altitudes, the air is thinner and offers less resistance. The immediate effect is on ball speed shots travel faster, bounce higher, and carry deeper than players are accustomed to at sea level. What feels like a controlled rally ball elsewhere can suddenly sail long in Bengaluru.

This has a cascading effect on every aspect of the game: from racquet preparation and stroke mechanics to tactics and physical endurance.

One of the first adjustments players must make is with racquet string tension. Because the ball tends to "fly" more in thinner air, players generally need to string their racquets tighter than usual.

Loose strings amplify the trampoline effect, reducing control and increasing the risk of over-hitting. Finding the correct tension is a personal equation. —*PTI*

Gukesh to participate in Norway Chess 2026

DUBAI, 4 FEB

Reigning Chess World Champion D. Gukesh will take part in Norway Chess 2026, to be held in Oslo in May. The 19-year-old will be part of a strong field that includes defending champion Magnus Carlsen. Gukesh, the youngest undisputed world champion in history, finished third in the Open section of the tournament last year.

"I am really happy to take part in Norway Chess again, fighting against a very strong field as always, and looking forward to all the exciting games," said Gukesh. —*PTI*

U-19 WORLD CUP

Aaron George's classy hundred carries India to finals

HARARE, 4 FEB

Aaron George's silken hundred seamlessly merged with the explosive fifties from IPL stars Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre, guiding India to the ICC U-19 World Cup final with a seven-wicket win over Afghanistan here on Wednesday.

India now faces England in the summit clash here on Friday. It will be India's 10th final in the U-19 showpiece, a testimony to BCCI's structured junior cricket programme that unearths serious talent.

India seemed to have a tough task ahead once Afghanistan piled 310 for four, built around hundreds by Faisal Shinozada (110) and Uzairullah Niazal (101).

But India cantered past the target in 41.1 overs, and it was also their highest-ever chase in the U19 World Cup. Aaron (115, 104b) led the chase with a hundred of impeccable pace and precision placements of his shots.

He received ample backing from Suryavanshi (68, 33b) and Mhatre (62, 59b) as India kept their run-rate above seven all the while. As is his vaunt, Sooryavanshi gave a flying start to India's innings with a flurry of boundaries, mainly off off-spinner Wahidullah Zadran. —*PTI*

Mirabai Chanu breaks three National Records

MODINAGAR, 4 FEB

Olympic silver medallist Mirabai Chanu broke three National Records during the National Weightlifting Championship 2026 in Modinagar, Uttar Pradesh, on Wednesday.

The 31-year-old, competing in the 48kg category, recorded a best lift of 89kg in snatch and 116kg in Clean & Jerk. With a combined lift of 205kg, she secured the top spot on the podium, finishing 22 kg ahead of her nearest competitor.

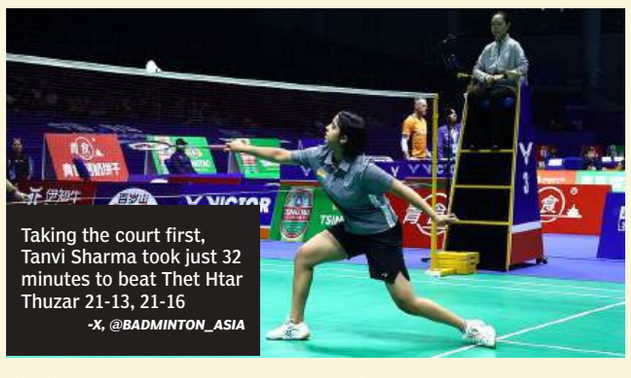
She further tried to better the record with an attempt at 91kg but was unsuccessful. Meanwhile, Radha Soni and Komal Kohar secured silver and bronze, respectively.

Following a rejig of Olympic weight classes, Mirabai Chanu moved from the 49 kg division back to the 48 kg category in 2025. In the 49kg category, Mirabai's total Personal Best was 205kg (86 + 119), which she achieved during the 2021 Asian Championships. —*PTI*

BADMINTON ASIA TEAM C'SHIP

Indian women open title defence with 5-0 win

QINGDAO, 4 FEB



Taking the court first, Tanvi Sharma took just 32 minutes to beat Thet Htar Thuzar 21-13, 21-16 -X, @BADMINTON_ASIA

Defending champions Indian women's team started its campaign at the Badminton Asia Team Championships on a resounding note, blanking Myanmar 5-0 in their opening Group Y tie here on Wednesday.

Taking the court first, Tanvi Sharma took just 32 minutes to beat Thet Htar Thuzar 21-13 21-16 before Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj defeated Eaint Chit Phoo 21-12 21-6 in the second singles to take a 2-0 lead.

Malvika Bansod then sealed the tie for India as she got the better of Lin Lin Htet 21-19 21-12 in the third singles.

The Indians continued their domination in doubles as well, winning both matches in straight games.

The pair of Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra defeated Su Latt and Thet Htar Thuzar 21-15, 21-16 before Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand hardly broke a sweat to get past the combination of Htet and Phoo 21-8, 21-6.

India will play last edition's runner-up side, Thailand, in their second group match on Thursday.

India is without the services of their most experienced and successful player, PV Sindhu.

The two-time Olympic medallist withdrew from the 2026 Badminton Asia Team Championships 2026 following a minor medical concern. India couldn't name a replacement for Sindhu as the deadline for squad changes passed at the time of her announcement. —*PTI*

Yamal scores as Barcelona beats Albacete 2-1

MADRID, 4 FEB

Lamine Yamal and Ronald Araujo scored in each half as Barcelona beat second-division Albacete 2-1 on Tuesday night to reach the semifinals of the Copa del Rey.

Albacete had shocked Real Madrid in the round of 16, eliminating the Spanish powerhouse in what was the debut of new coach Álvaro Arbeloa.

It was Barcelona's 16th win in its last 17 matches across all tournaments, with its only setback a loss at Real Sociedad in the Spanish league last month.

Barcelona has reached the Copa's last-four in four straight seasons. It won last year's edition in a final against Madrid.

"We knew it wouldn't be easy," Araujo said. "Copa matches aren't decided until the very end. They found a goal, and it's normal for them to come at you in the final minutes. The team handled it well. We're in the semifinal,s and that's what's important." Yamal gave the visitors the lead with a left-footed shot from inside the area in the 39th minute after an assist by midfielder Frenkie de Jong. —*PTI*